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WELL BEHAVED WOMEN RARELY MAKE HISTORY:  
AN EXAMINATION OF THE LIFE OF JACQUELINE COCHRAN

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in  
Interdisciplinary Studies:  
Public and Oral History, Museum Studies, and Archival Practices

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by  
Frankie Lynn Patino  
June 2020

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Approved by:

Dr. Thomas Long, Committee Chair, History

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the life of aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran. The analysis starts from her childhood through her aviation career and ultimately concludes with the legacy she left behind. Through this examination various topics will be discussed and analyzed, such as but not limited to, Jackie's childhood, Jaqueline Cosmetics, aviation, World War II specifically focusing on the WASPS, her late career and her "retirement." Prominently highlighting her impact in aviation history and her eminent role in changing women's place within it, this thesis explores the experience of Cochran and argues that she was a vital factor in women's breakthrough into aviation and paved the way for future generations of female pilots. She shattered traditional gender roles and changed societal views of women's abilities pertaining to aviation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I was a baby my Boom Boom (Grandma) would always dress me in my USC onesie and tell me “you’re going to go to USC...on a scholarship.” However, I chose California State University, San Bernardino to pursue my educational goals. Looking back, I am beyond grateful that I chose CSUSB because of the faculty mentorship I received throughout my time there. With specific appreciation for my mentor, Dr. Thomas Long. I cannot express my gratitude enough for his guidance and support throughout my pursuance of my educational goals. I would also like to thank my family for always believing in me and instilling the belief that nothing was out of reach. Without their steadfast support, I don’t believe this thesis would have ever come to fruition.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction and Literature Review

When I first came across the historical figure of Jacqueline Cochran, two things really surprised me. First, her accomplishments in setting both speed and altitude records for a woman in aviation were staggering and, second, when she accomplished these, and so many other feats in aeronautics, it was from the 1930's and into the 1960's. As the world's most prominent unsung aviatrix, Jacqueline Cochran is a hidden gem of history. Flying during the era of famous pilots such as Amelia Earhart and Charles Lindbergh, she flew past barriers that were most prominently present for the women of her time. Coming from humble origins, she emerged from poverty and established a prominent name for herself as the "queen of the sky," paving the way for future generations of women to hold a place within aviation. She was a woman of firsts: first to fly a bomber and jet across the Atlantic, first to participate in the Bendix and place first, first to break the sound barrier and exceed Mach 2, and the first woman President of the F.A.I. to simply name a few.<sup>1</sup> Flying higher and faster than most pilots of her time, "she held more speed and altitude records than any pilot in history" at the time of her

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<sup>1</sup> Cochrane, D., and P. Ramirez. "Women in Aviation and Space History: Jacqueline Cochran." Women in Aviation and Space History - Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. <https://airandspace.si.edu/explore-and-learn/topics/women-in-aviation/cochran.cfm>.

death: over 250 speed, altitude, and distance records not only set for females but male aviators as well.<sup>2</sup>

Her accomplishments demonstrated that women had everything needed to fly alongside the men and in some cases do it better. Ravishing in her femininity she took women to new heights while ensuring her lipstick and hair were always in place. This thesis will explore the life experience of Cochran to argue that she was a vital factor in women's breakthrough into aviation. She paved the way for future generations of female pilots, while shattering traditional gender roles and changing societal views of women's abilities pertaining to aviation.

Her autobiographies, *The Stars at Noon* and *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, prominently present the details on Cochran's life.<sup>3</sup> These books illustrate her life through vivid stories focusing heavily on her accomplishments and exclude core elements of her life story. Cochran's narration places her in the best light possible and eludes the factual accounts in occasional instances such as her marriage to Robert Cochran, the birth and death of her son, as well as her time between Columbus and Montgomery. Nonetheless, the details give the reader a basis for further research by offering a highly embellished version of history. The books also provide a personal account of history pertaining to

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Cochran, Jacqueline, and Floyd B. Odum. *The Stars at Noon*. North Stratford, NH: Ayer Co. Publishers, 2000.

Cochran, Jacqueline, and Maryann Bucknum. Brinley. *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988.

Cochran's involvement in aviation. These sources are the only two written during Cochran's lifetime and further analysis would not be offered until years after her death. These autobiographies shed light on Cochran's life, but only in the best of ways. This is an example of the limitations of autobiographies pertaining specifically to research. Not only can information be skewed, but often ill balanced and lacking multiple viewpoints. Therefore, autobiographical sources were used in the initial research of this thesis only as a steppingstone until expanded upon to further create a well-balanced narrative.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from her autobiographies, there are a handful of interviews conducted with Jackie that approach her character from a different viewpoint. These interviews include *The Reminiscences* conducted by Columbia University Library, three oral histories held at the Eisenhower Presidential Library, and one interview offered by the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library. All of these offer in depth detail pertaining to different aspects of Jackie's life.<sup>5</sup>

Her life has been studied further by few scholars, the two most prominent being Rhonda Smith-Daugherty and Doris L. Rich. Both of their works provide a chronological analysis of Cochran's life. The account that Rhonda Smith-Daugherty presents in, *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator* places Cochran in a historical context pertaining to the "history of women in

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<sup>4</sup> "Historical Research Methods: Strengths and Weaknesses." UKessays.com. 11 2018. All Answers Ltd. 05 2020 <<https://www.ukessays.com/essays/history/the-strengths-and-limitations-of-using-biography.php?vref=1>>.

<sup>5</sup> Transcript, Jacqueline Cochran Oral Interview: *The Reminiscences*, May 1960, by Kenneth Leish, Electronic Copy, Columbia University Library.

aviation and war.”<sup>6</sup> Through the accomplishments of Cochran, the author also offers a study on women and the space exploration program as well as “the study of women and minorities in politics.”<sup>7</sup> There is one stark discrepancy within Smith’s research pertaining to Cochran’s life prior to her aviation career. Smith relied heavily on the autobiographical source for Cochran’s life prior to fame, being that in Cochran’s autobiography she excludes her marriage, child, and reasons for moving to different cities. Therefore, Smith presents a false narrative in two specific aspects: how Bessie Pittman became Jackie Cochran as well as her family background.

Doris L. Rich presents a critical biography with her book *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*<sup>8</sup> by offering an in-depth analysis of Cochran’s life, and successfully fills in the gaps in the historical record of her life.<sup>9</sup> Rich also attempts to portray Cochran’s story in an unbiased light, revealing both the positive and negative aspects of her career, personality, and beliefs all in a historical context. While Rich discusses Cochran’s contributions and accomplishments, she does not hesitate to portray Jackie’s conflicting views regarding female pilots and women’s role in aviation.<sup>10</sup> Continually, reinforcing the notion that Jackie was not

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<sup>6</sup> Smith-Daugherty, Rhonda. *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> Rich, Doris L. *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> McLennan, Sarah. Review of Rich, Doris L., *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*. H-SAWH, H-Net Reviews. June, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

a feminist, nor did she liberate women from their traditional roles. This is portrayed through countless statements such as, “much about Cochran is contradictory, though she herself achieved so much, she hated the women’s movement and did not believe that women should go into combat or become astronauts.”<sup>11</sup> Rich also stated, “she chose to remain outside the circle and camaraderie of women pilots, most of whom were members of the Ninety-Nines.”<sup>12</sup> Statements such as this are inaccurate being that Cochran would become President of the Ninety-Nines in 1941. Although Cochran was undoubtedly contradictory, various statements such as the ones above create an exaggerated sense of Cochran’s viewpoints and casts a shadow over Cochran’s accomplishments and advancements for women in aviation. Aside from these two autobiographies, there are numerous brief references in various books that concisely mention Jackie in passing.

### Methodology

Jacqueline Cochran “reigned for three decades as aviation’s first lady.”<sup>13</sup> After receiving her pilots license in 1932, she dedicated her life to aviation until ultimately being grounded in 1971 due to heart complications. As an aviatrix, Cochran took women to new heights. She broke records, established the

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<sup>11</sup> Rich, Doris L. *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), p. viii.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>13</sup> “Jacqueline Cochran Pioneer Aviator.” *The Journal News*. August 10, 1980.

WASPs, and was the first woman to accomplish numerous different feats within aviation. Looking at the tremendous number of accomplishments Cochran's possessed, it is difficult to believe one person was able to conquer all that she did. Even though she was one of the greatest pilots of all time, she has been greatly underrepresented within historical discussions and placed in the background of aviation history. This thesis will examine the life of Cochran to argue that she was a vital factor in women's breakthrough into aviation and paved the way for future generations of female pilots, while shattering traditional gender roles and changing societal views of women's abilities pertaining to aviation.

To prove this argument this thesis relies heavily on primary sources. Cochran's two autobiographies and oral histories offer a detailed portrayal of her life from birth through retirement. These sources provide a first-hand account of the accomplishments and events that are discussed throughout this thesis. Alongside Cochran's autobiographies, newspaper articles printed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century are used to capture the essence of the times. The newspaper articles also contribute to an overall understanding of how Cochran's life differed from the average woman; specifically, to be used to further the argument that she shattered traditional gender roles and paved the way for future aviatrixes.

Secondary sources pertaining to female aviation history, World War II, and feminism are used throughout this thesis to further construct the significance of Cochran's life story. The two prominent secondary sources to be used are

*Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator* and *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*.<sup>14</sup> Both sources contribute a historical narrative around Cochran and provide an analysis of her place within history, enhancing the overall argument of this thesis pertaining to Cochran's importance in women's role in aviation history.

This thesis will examine Cochran's life to further the understanding of women's role within aviation. The examination of traditional gender roles and societal views will be used to demonstrate the significance of Cochran's contribution; ultimately arguing that she was a vital factor in women's break through into aviation and paved the way for future generations of female pilots, while shattering traditional gender roles and changing societal views of women's abilities pertaining to aviation.

### The Rise of American Feminism

As stated previously, this thesis analyzes the life of Cochran to demonstrate her significance in aviation history. Using the rise of the feminist movement to demonstrate women's struggles in Cochran's time provides a better understanding of the limitations and gender discrimination that Cochran faced

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<sup>14</sup> Rich, Doris L. *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010. / Smith-Daugherty, Rhonda. *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012.



during her career, and further demonstrates the significance of her accomplishments.

*Feminism*<sup>15</sup>

1. the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes
2. organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests

Feminism has always been present in human civilization, it is seen throughout history and continues into the present moment. For the purpose of this thesis, the rise of American Feminism will only be discussed to strengthen the significance of Cochran's life story. The term Feminism would not be used in the United States until the early twentieth century<sup>16</sup>; however, feminism was exemplified through the women's suffrage movement. The movement began in the United States during the nineteenth century with activist such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucy Stone.<sup>17</sup> These individuals alongside others began the women's suffrage movement which sought to grant women the right to vote. "The meeting that began on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1848, at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York launched the first organized

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<sup>15</sup> "Feminism." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>.

<sup>16</sup> Cott, Nancy F. *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

<sup>17</sup> "Women's Rights Timeline." National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. Accessed May 6, 2020. <https://www.archives.gov/women/timeline#event-/timeline/item/e-cady-stanton-susan-b-anthony-and-lucy-stone-ask-friends-to-send-petitions-for-womens-suffrage>.

movement for women 's rights in the United States.”<sup>18</sup> The Seneca Falls Convention was intended to call upon citizens to organize together and petition for women’s rights. This convention became an annual occurrence and sparked future conventions, petitions and rallies which ultimately led to the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920; The Nineteenth Amendment granted women the right to vote and was viewed as a substantial win for the women’s movement. The 1920’s would offer the rise of the new woman, an “active participant in American politics and economic life.”<sup>19</sup>

Women took to new roles and explored areas previously confined to men, one of which being aviation. The industry was in its infancy and still viewed as dangerous and unobtainable, to change this view manufacturers used female pilots as advertisements to sell the idea of flight.<sup>20</sup> This allowed for more women to have access into the industry; however, their role was a passive one that did not utilize their full potential.<sup>21</sup> Aviatrices also faced gender prejudices and discrimination, often having to “conform to feminine norms for the cause of

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<sup>18</sup> Davis, Sue. "Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the Multiple Traditions." In *the Political Thought of Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Women's Rights and the American Political Traditions*, 1-38. New York; London: NYU Press, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Freedman, Estelle B. "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s." *The Journal of American History* 61, no. 2 (1974): 372-93.

<sup>20</sup> Bell, Elizabeth S., "A Place in the Sky: Women Writing About Aviation, 1920-1940," *Proteus: A Journal of Ideas* (1993).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

flight.”<sup>22</sup> Female pilots took the women’s movement to the sky and fought to liberate the air, facing the same barriers as women did on the ground.

In the following decades women’s presence continued to expand in the workforce which prompted a new fight for the women’s movement, equal pay. In 1963, “the Equal Pay Act was passed by Congress, promising equitable wages for the same work, regardless of the race, color, religion, national origin or sex of the worker.”<sup>23</sup> These occurrences marked great success for the women’s movement, but prominent cultural and social issues for women were still present. The 1960’s would transition feminism into its second wave, focusing on “the women’s liberation movement for equal legal and social rights.”<sup>24</sup>

The second wave of feminism can be encapsulated through *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan.<sup>25</sup> Friedan challenges the notion of women’s traditional role of domesticity and sought to inspire women to break free from the stereotypical roles.

The suburban housewife- she was the dream image of the young American woman and the envy, it was said, of women all over the world. The American housewife freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illness of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated, concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfillment. As a housewife and mother, she was respected as a full and equal partner to a man in his world. She was free to choose automobiles,

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<sup>22</sup> Corn, Joseph J. "Making Flying "Thinkable": Women Pilots and the Selling of Aviation, 1927-1940." *American Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (1979): 556-71.

<sup>23</sup> Milligan, Susan. "Stepping Through History." U.S. News & World Report. U.S. News & World Report. Accessed May 6, 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Ohio Humanities. "OH Blog and News." Ohio Humanities. <http://www.ohiohumanities.org/betty-friedan-the-three-waves-of-feminism/>.

<sup>25</sup> Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. United Kingdom: W. W. Norton, 2001.

clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of.<sup>26</sup>

Friedan uses this description as a tool to construct the societal restrictions that are placed upon women during her era. She urged women to break free from these traditional roles and find themselves outside of their family identity and to confront “the problem that had no name.”<sup>27</sup> To create this book she interviewed American women to capture the general life experience of women in the United States. Her findings exemplified the discontent of the gender roles of American women and brought this issue to the forefront of the contemporary women’s movement. “The book helped transform public awareness and brought many women into the vanguard of the women’s movement, just as it propelled Friedan into its early leadership.”<sup>28</sup> Friedan would be a prominent activist for gender equality and inspire women to seek life fulfillment through work that would enhance society, alongside enhancing women’s role outside of the home.<sup>29</sup> Another portrayal of the feminist view point can be seen through a quote from Gloria Steinem:

Being a feminist means that you see the world whole instead of half. It shouldn’t need a name. And one day it won’t. Feminism starts as something very simple. It starts as a little child who says, 'it’s not fair' and

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 60-61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>28</sup> Michals, Debra “Betty Friedan.” National Women’s History Museum. 2017. [www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/betty-friedan](http://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/betty-friedan).

<sup>29</sup> Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

'you are not the boss of me'. There is something in us that knows that, and it ends up being a world view that questions hierarchy all together.<sup>30</sup>

In relation to the statement above and the rise of feminism in general, Cochran's life story offers a superb example of all that feminism encompasses and fought for. When thinking of the feminist movement in its historical context alongside Cochran's life story, it exemplifies her accomplishments and demonstrates how she broke barriers and was a trail blazer for women not only in aviation but the women's experience in general. Women have been placed in the background of aviation history and greatly underrepresented in the historical discussion. This thesis will explore the experience of Cochran to argue that she was a vital factor in women's breakthrough into aviation and paved the way for future generations of female pilots, while shattering traditional gender roles and changing societal views of women's abilities pertaining to aviation. Thus, whether Ms. Cochran intended to serve as a feminist role model or not, as an historical actor with agency, she literally embodied significant aspects of the feminist movement of the first three generations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Bessie Pittman

When looking at the end of Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran's life, she was a woman filled with honor, accomplishments, and class. She lived an extravagant

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<sup>30</sup> Burkett, Elinor. "Women's Rights Movement." Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., March 5, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/event/womens-movement>.

life, jet setting across the world, corresponding with high society, and ending up with her name in countless record books. However, the beginning of her life was anything but extravagant. She entered this world with next to nothing, not even knowing her name or actual date of birth. The date of May eleventh seemed “as good as any,” and through a joint decision with her foster parents, May 11, 1908 became her birthday.<sup>31</sup> Never knowing the story of her actual birthdate or parents, she knew only that she was an orphan, taken in by a family named the Pittman's. Her “parents” became Ira and Mary, and she gained four siblings: Henry, Joe, Myrtle, and Mamie. Through them she would become known as Bessie Pittman, another child born into to the devastating world of the sawmills.

In her formative years, Bessie would move throughout multiple sawmill towns located in northern Florida. The sawmill towns of Bagdad, Sampson, Millville and Panama City all held the same level of poverty and despair.<sup>32</sup> Cochran would not own her first pair of shoes until the age of eight and would not know the feeling of sleeping on a bed until later in life. Her home was that of a usual sawmill town shack, one large room with no windowpanes and only paper to take the place of them.<sup>33</sup> This shack became even more bleak when her father became ill with typhoid fever and the family had to endure losing the wages of the main provider. Her brothers were of working age, but one was born with a

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<sup>31</sup> Cochran, Jacqueline, and Maryann Bucknum. Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1988), p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 12-18.

<sup>33</sup> Cochran, Jacqueline, and Floyd B. Odum, *The Stars at Noon*, (North Stratford, NH: Ayer Co. Publishers, 2000), p. 5.

crippled foot disabling him from being able to earn a full wage.<sup>34</sup> It was not until her father healed that the family was able to begin to advance their quality of life in the sawmill towns. Bessie states that, “work by three men enabled us to progress from the shack to a company house and with our chip money we could get the necessities.”<sup>35</sup> The necessities included attending school for the first time in Bagdad.

At the age of six Bessie began school briefly until her schoolteacher, Anna Thompson, whipped her with a ruler and she chose not to return for a year. In the meantime, she had limited discipline, learning more about life than academics. She attempted escaping from her life and starting anew through the circus and with gypsies; however, both attempts failed, and she had no choice but to continue on. At the age of seven she returned to school because there was a new teacher, Miss Bostwick. Bostwick undoubtedly changed the course of Bessie’s life for the better, she gave Bessie her first wages in turn for bringing firewood to her bedroom. From this exchange they began to build a friendship, Bostwick bought Bessie her first dress and taught her how to read. She would continue teaching through the next winter and when her term ended so did Bessie’s schooling.<sup>36</sup> However, true to her character she pushed on and found something else to fill her time. There were numerous women having babies in the sawmill towns and Bessie saw this as an economic opportunity. She began

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 11-19.

caring for the new mothers and their households, earning ten cents per day for her work and saving every penny of it. She would later use this money to buy a doll which was taken away from her and given to her younger sibling, something that seemed to bother Bessie long into adulthood.<sup>37</sup> Right around this time, the sawmill industry began to plummet, and the Pittman's had to look elsewhere for work. Setting their sights on the cotton mills in Columbus, Georgia.

This move would serve to be beneficial being that during this time, the cotton mill industry was greatly thriving. Columbus, Georgia would serve to be one of the largest producers in the industry, this meant that there was a plethora of job opportunities. The Bill Mill offers an example of one of the mills located in Columbus, Georgia and the conditions within these mills:

Imagine working in a hot southern mill for 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, for only \$10 a week. For men, women, and children working at the Bibb before the 1930s, this was a grim reality. Inside the mill, the air was full of dust and lint that swirled up from the spinning process. The massive machines were very loud it was hot, extremely hot! Temperatures reached 118°F in the later summer.<sup>38</sup>

As child labor laws were very loose during this era, everyone in the Pittman family would end up working in the sawmills. At the age of eight, Bessie in her own words would leave her childhood behind. Although the work was hard it seemed to make Bessie content because it allowed the family to improve their quality of life. At this point, every individual in the family was working allowing for

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 19—22.

<sup>38</sup> Becker, Dr. Becky. "Bibb City: Collected Lives from a Mill Town." Bibb City: Collected Lives from a Mill Town. Columbus State University, September 2, 2014.



the Pittmans to take out enough credit to move into a home with a bathroom, obtain mattresses, blankets, and a stove; all being luxuries they had never experienced previously.<sup>39</sup> Surprisingly, she didn't seem to mind the strenuous hours of the mill work being it granted her independence, her hard work paid off and she was promoted four times. She went from a spool deliverer, to repairing the warp, and then promoted to the inspection room where she then again moved to her final position, which was an executive training position. All of which seem far more impressive keeping in mind that at the time Bessie was still under the age of ten.<sup>40</sup> This job served Bessie well until a strike hit the textile industry, lasting roughly three months and forcing her to find her next opportunity.

Through a woman at the mill she was introduced to Mattie Richler, an entrepreneur who ran three successful beauty shops in Columbus. Bessie agreed to do chores and busy work around the shop and aid in duties within the household in exchange for a place to live and \$1.50 a week. She was willing to accept the significant pay cut because she recognized that the beauty shop held more opportunity and a better shot at an escape from the mill town.<sup>41</sup> As time passed she quickly picked up the skills of the trade, eagerly soaking in knowledge of the beauty industry any way she could. She would assist the stylist in the salon with dying, weaving and perming hair which increased her weekly earning to as much as ten dollars, allowing her to alleviate a portion of her

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<sup>39</sup> Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>41</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 39.

family's financial burden.<sup>42</sup> This job would serve her well for two more years, allowing her to build a savings, a comfort that seemed far fetch just a couple years prior. Her fortune continued to advance and by luck and her good sense she was able to become a full-time beauty operator after threatening to expose Richler that she was employing a child under the age of sixteen. "The man from the child welfare board is hardly out the door and the little lightbulb in my head is blinking like crazily. It's a plan, an outrageous plan. The next thing poor Richler knows is that I'm demanding full pay as a beauty operator or I will tell the investigator the truth."<sup>43</sup> Surprisingly, Richler did not call Bessie's bluff and granted her the beauty operator position, increasing her pay to roughly \$30 per week.

Another year had passed before a traveling salesman entered the beauty shop looking for a permanent wave machine operator, and of course Bessie felt like she was the perfect person for the job. She left Richler's beauty shop behind and set out for her next adventure in Montgomery, Alabama as "a permanent wave expert at (maybe) fifteen."<sup>44</sup> However, this is not the actual account of events, Bessie disregarded in both her autobiographies a significant portion of time between Richler's beauty shop and her move to Montgomery, disregarding the reality of a marriage and a child.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 40.

FLORIDA STATE BOARD OF HEALTH  
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS

CERTIFICATE OF DEATH  
State File No. **7389**

1 PLACE OF DEATH  
County Walton District No. 51-01

Precinct (Write name, not number) Precinct No. 51514

2 FULL NAME Robert Cochran Jr. City & Town No. 51514 St. Ward

(a) Residence No. De Funiak Springs, Fla. (Usual place of abode) (If nonresident give city or town and State)

Length of residence in city or town where death occurred yrs. mos. ds. How long in U. S., if of foreign birth? yrs. mos. ds.

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS			MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH	
3 SEX <u>Male</u>	4 COLOR OR RACE <u>White</u>	5 Single <u>Single</u> Married Widowed Or Divorced	16 DATE OF DEATH (Month, day and year) <u>5-29-25</u>	17 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from <u>5-29-25</u> to <u>5-29-25</u> that I last saw him alive on <u>5-29-25</u> and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at <u>1:30 p.m.</u>
6a If married, widowed, or divorced HUSBAND of _____ (or) WIFE of _____			The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows: <u>He burned (accidental)</u> <u>No burning log in</u> <u>involved</u> (duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds.	
6 DATE OF BIRTH <u>May 29 1925</u> (Month) (Day) (Year)			CONTRIBUTORY (Secondary) <u>Shock</u> (duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds.	
7 AGE <u>5</u> yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds. or _____ min. IF LESS than 1 day, _____ hrs. _____ min.			18 Where was disease contracted If not at place of death? <u>Yes</u> Date of _____	
8 OCCUPATION OF DECEASED (a) Trade, profession, or particular kind of work <u>none</u> (b) General nature of industry, business, or establishment in which employed (for employer) <u>none</u> (c) Name of employer _____			Did an operation precede death? <u>No</u> Was there an autopsy? <u>No</u> What test confirmed diagnosis? <u>Physician's</u> (Signed) <u>Dr. F. J. ...</u> (Address) <u>De Funiak Springs, Fla.</u>	
9 BIRTHPLACE (city or town) <u>Pensacola, Fla.</u> (State or country)			*State the Disease Causing Death, or in deaths from violent causes, state (1) Means and Nature of Injury, and (2) whether Accidental, Suicidal, or Homicidal. (See reverse side for additional space.)	
10 NAME OF FATHER <u>Robt. Cochran</u> (City or State or country)			19 Place of Burial, Cremation, or Removal <u>De Funiak Springs</u> Date of Burial or Removal <u>5-29-25</u>	
11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (Town) <u>Homestead, Fla.</u> (State or country)			20 UNDERTAKER <u>Friends</u> ADDRESS <u>2</u>	
12 MAIDEN NAME OF MOTHER <u>Bevie Pittman</u> (City or State or country)				
13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (Town) <u>Homestead, Fla.</u> (State or country)				
14 Informant (Address) <u>Dr. F. J. ...</u>				
15 Filed <u>May 29 1925</u> <u>De Funiak Springs</u> Registrar				

Form V. S. No. 4

Figure 1. Death Certificate of Robert Cochran Jr.  
Photo by "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints" FamilySearch.

In virtually every source the narrative of Bessie's life during this time has been severely miss represented.

After a year in Columbus, Bessie left for a department store salon in Montgomery, Alabama...Bessie's stay in Montgomery brought greater personal enrichment and opportunity. She earned money, learned to dance, dressed in stylish clothes, bought a Model T Ford, and dated young college men.<sup>45</sup>

Although, the statement above would prove to be true for Bessie's life, it would occur later than the presented timeline. In between her move from Columbus to Montgomery Bessie would travel to DeFuniak Springs, Florida, where she would marry Robert Cochran a traveling salesman. "Three months and one week after her marriage she gave birth to a son, Robert Cochran, Jr."<sup>46</sup> However, marriage and the birth of a child would not settle Bessie's wild heart and within a few months after giving birth she would leave her baby with her foster parents and set out to start a life in Montgomery. With minor discrepancies the timeline would now coincide with her own portrayal of her life story.

While in Montgomery, Bessie took full advantage of her financial freedom the beauty salon (Nachman and Meertief) offered her. She found an upscale home to live in with a lady she met by knocking on the front door. After much persuasion the woman agreed to rent Bessie a room within the house. She worked long days in the beauty salon, making excellent money and even better

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<sup>45</sup> Smith-Daugherty, Rhonda. *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012), p.13.

<sup>46</sup> Rich, Doris L. *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), p. 13.

social connections. The most prominent of these connections being her client Mrs. Lerton, “the first woman to hold public office in the state of Alabama.”<sup>47</sup> Lerton became a mentor to Bessie not only through aspects of reading, cooking, and sewing, but most importantly in her social introductions as well as her persuasion for Bessie to temporarily leave the beauty industry behind and enter the healthcare field.

Bessie was never a strong student, not for lack of intelligence, but rather, circumstance. Because of this, she had very few schooling years and knew she would never pass the state examination to enter into training as a nurse. As much else in Bessie’s later life, serendipity played a role, and Lerton’s sway in the local hospital granted Bessie admittance into the program.<sup>48</sup> She spent three years training at St. Margaret’s Hospital excelling in nursing but greatly lacking in the academic portions of training. This being the case, Bessie would never have the opportunity to become a licensed nurse, but this did not hinder her ability to act as one.

Her return to “Sawdust Road” was not by choice, but rather circumstance. “Bessie’s happy years in Montgomery ended abruptly with the horrifying news from Florida that her four-year-old son, Robert, had been fatally burned in a yard fire on May 19, 1925.”<sup>49</sup> Upon hearing this news Bessie uprooted from Montgomery to DeFuniak Springs to arrange the funeral of her son. While here

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<sup>47</sup> Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>49</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 15.

she resided with her parents and mourned the loss of her only child. After a few months Bessie began to feel the financial burden of being without work, she decided to use her training as a nurse in a sawmill town of Bonifay, Florida. This would be one of the few locations that she could serve as a nurse without possessing an actual license.<sup>50</sup> However, Bessie's later accounts (or then Jaqueline Cochran) would paint her decision to practice nursing in Bonifay in a much different light. Cochran referred to herself as a Florence Nightingale, excluding the detail of the loss of her son and the near divorce of her husband Robert Cochran.

When I completed my formal training, I decided not to take the state board examinations. I just didn't dare attempt that test. I knew I'd fail. My handwriting alone, not to mention my rudimentary arithmetic would never have allowed me to pass. I suppose I couldn't bear the thought of flunking, losing this race Mrs. Lerton had so invested in. So, I used the excuse of an immediate position within the County doctor in Bonifay, Florida. I didn't need to be licensed by anyone to become the Florence Nightingale to the same sawdust road people I had grown up with. They needed me I told myself as well as Mrs. Lerton as I piled my belongings into my Model T.<sup>51</sup>

The reasons of the purposeful disregard of her son and husband are still unknown. The sole point is that for whatever reason, unbeknownst to anyone but Bessie Pittman herself, she did not want this period of her life known to the world and took great effort in enshrouding the past.

Bessie's nursing days were burdensome. The environment was far from what it should have been to be considered a doctor's office and most if not all the

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<sup>50</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

equipment was far from sterile.<sup>52</sup> None the less she worked with what she had and assisted the doctor with surgeries related to work related incidents, such as amputations; at one point she even delivered a baby when the doctor could not be found.<sup>53</sup> After delivering the baby Bessie realized the level of poverty this place still held, and she was struck with the urge to make a change; Knowing she was not powerful enough to make change acting as nurse, she decided to leave the mill town behind and ambitiously set out to make the amount of money that held the potential to enact change. Bessie left sawdust road behind yet again and for the next few years she found many places to lay her hat, each for only brief moments at a time.

### The 1920's: A Wandering Soul

The 1920s in America was a time of excess, expansion of social liberalism and economic prosperity. World War I had moved the US to the top of the international market and created the “boom era,” specifically, there was a new world of American women that emerged in the 1920's. Many were calling it the “women's era.”<sup>54</sup> The stage was set when the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment granted women the right to vote; Continually, from that point on women were breaking barriers and entering into fields previously excluded from. Bessie would take full

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Matthews, Jean V. *The Rise of the New Woman: The Women's Movement in America, 1875-1930*. Chicago: I.R. Dee, 2003.

advantage of the freedom the 1920's offered women. Her restless soul would take her many places, the first of which would be Mobile, Alabama where she returned to the beauty industry. For a year she worked as a stylist at Pearson's Beauty Shoppe and lived with her uncle and his family. During this time, her husband whom she had been separated from, sought a divorce on the grounds of adultery.<sup>55</sup> Multiple appeals were made and after producing a witness for the adultery Robert Cochran's appeal was ultimately granted on February 5, 1927.<sup>56</sup> This divorce hardly seemed to effect Bessie and she continued on until tragedy struck yet again and she had to return to DeFuniak Springs, Florida.

The Influenza Epidemic of 1928 swept across the United States, affecting countless cities and small towns, including DeFuniak Springs. Although, this epidemic served to be substantially less lethal than its counterpart pandemic in 1918, it still took roughly 50,000 lives.<sup>57</sup> Bessie's entire family was diagnosed with influenza and would recover, aside from her foster father who succumbed to the illness late in 1928. Following his death, she took it upon herself to bury him and knew from that point on she would be the one to look after the family. In order to do so, Cochran sought better opportunities for employment in Pensacola, Florida.

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<sup>55</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 16.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Collins, Selwyn D. "The Influenza Epidemic of 1928-29 in 14 Surveyed Localities in the United States: An Analysis, According to Age, Sex, and Color, of the Records of Morbidity and Mortality Obtained in the Surveys." *Public Health Reports (1896-1970)* 49, no. 1 (1934): 14.



Pensacola would serve as a home base for Bessie over the next few years. She was able to remain in the beauty industry, but this time not as an employee but as a joint owner. The beauty shop was originally run by Jeanne Stickley, whom Bessie described as a rather persuadable woman.<sup>58</sup> Taking advantage of this observation, she invested in new equipment for the salon in exchange for becoming a business partner. From this venture she transitioned to life on the road, something that would not keep her confined within the walls of a small business. "I answered an ad and got a job selling dress patterns and materials through various sections of the South. I had my car for travel."<sup>59</sup> This lasted for a few more months until Bessie outgrew the position and knew she wanted more than what it could ultimately offer her.

The next stop was Biloxi, Mississippi where she managed a beauty salon in the Edgewater Beach Hotel. She was surprisingly content in this position because of the social connections it offered her. However, nature changed her course with a hurricane's devastation. The business was destroyed, and Bessie had no choice but to return to her business venture with Jeanne Stickley in Pensacola. To make her business in Pensacola more prosperous, she decided to enroll in a beauty operator course in Philadelphia.

"So, to Philadelphia I went. I knew I could earn my living anywhere. I could get a job on commission in any city or good-sized town within a matter of hours

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<sup>58</sup> Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 33.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

and be on my own as to income.”<sup>60</sup> This assumption and confidence proved to serve Bessie well, she began her courses and by the second day was asked to become an instructor, this position paid reasonably at sixty dollars per week. Bessie acted as an instructor for nine months and customarily grew bored, she returned to Pensacola with a substantial savings account and little gained beauty operating knowledge. Seeming to grow more desirous day by day, Bessie was only able to stand three months in Pensacola before she made the rash decision of selling her car, packing up everything, and purchasing a one-way train ticket to New York City.

It was a bold move, but Bessie knew she wasn’t the person she longed to be. That being said, Bessie stayed in Pensacola and Jacqueline “Jackie” Cochran boarded the train to New York City.

In Pensacola, I did something I had been considering for a long time. I went to the first phonebook I could find, ran my finger down a list of names, and decided on Cochran. It had the right ring to it. It sounded like me...I had my own life, a new one. What better way to begin than with my own name? *Cochran*. Why the hell not?<sup>61</sup>

Although, this statement is does not contain the factual detail of Cochran being the name of her ex-husband, this is the story she took to her grave. Never straying from this narrative, her closest friends believed this phone book tale, and who is to say Jackie didn’t come to believe it herself after years of embellishing this story. It is possible no one ever thought to question Jackie because she was

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>61</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 49.

not a woman to be reckoned with; how Cochran came to obtain her name is a minute detail in the grandeur scheme. Her accomplishments, records, and grit proved no matter the name, this woman would blaze a trail through history. In the coming decade, Cochran would enter into the field of aviation, shattering barriers that were present for female aviators and rising above the standard that was held of them by their male counterparts.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The 1930's: Full Speed Ahead



Figure 2. Portrait of Jackie Cochran  
Coachella Valley History Museum, Coachella Valley Historical Society, Inc.

The 1930's broke many Americans, taking everything they possessed and, turning some of the richest individuals into the poorest of society. However, this was not the case for every American, some were able to make it through the Great Depression unscathed. Cochran was one of these individuals. The 1930s

transformed her life from “rags to riches,” the girl from sawdust road who did not own a pair of shoes until the age of eight, would become a business tycoon in the beauty industry and decorated aviatrix by the end of the decade. “Though others might look back on ‘29 as the year of the great crash, it was a year of great growth for me.”<sup>62</sup> Through this growth Cochran would experience gender discrimination and inequality but would use her undeniable skill to change the societal views of women’s ability pertaining to aviation.

In 1929, Cochran disembarked the train in New York ready to make a name of herself, not lacking any confidence, she knew she had everything it would take to make it in the big city. She set her sights on one of the most elite salons in New York, which was located within the Ritz Hotel. However, all it took was one conversation with the manager, Charles Jundt, to bring this business deal to an abrupt halt. Their conversation was brief, he challenged Jackie’s beauty and talents and agreed to hire her under one condition, she cut her hair short. Later in time, the president of Charles of the Ritz would state, “Gentleness is a woman's most important quality.”<sup>63</sup> An idea that undoubtedly perpetuated throughout the business; however, for whatever reason Jackie’s stubbornness and lack of gentleness made a prominent impression on Charles. He called her the next day agreeing to hire her whatever her demands, Jackie turned it down.

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<sup>62</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 54.

<sup>63</sup> “It’s a Man’s World—in Manufacture of Cosmetics.” *The New York Times*, March 26, 1964.

Charles of the Ritz's competitor, Antoine of Saks Fifth Avenue became Jackie's newest venture. She quickly began building her empire of prestigious clientele, expanding not only her pockets, but her ability to invest in other opportunities.<sup>64</sup> She was a businesswoman to her core and knew how to capitalize on her new comfort. Rather than grow complacent in her new financial stability, she ventured into other salons throughout the city and invested. Her days became long, splitting her time between Antoine's where she was an operator, and the smaller salons where she oversaw the operators as part owner. Alongside these obligations, she also offered her expertise at Antoine's satellite location in Miami Beach each winter season.<sup>65</sup>

Miami Beach was a luxurious destination for the elite, making Jackie's beauty services not only beneficial financially but most important socially. She began to use the time doing hair to work her charm on the clients, leading to invitations to dinner parties, dances and various other social activities of the well to do society.<sup>66</sup> One of these events was a dinner party hosted by Stanton Griffis, an American businessman and diplomat, it was this evening that Jackie felt fate intervened and she had a date with destiny. The gathering was anything but modest and the guest list included actors and actresses, millionaires, and even a couple billionaires.

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<sup>64</sup> Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 39.

Amongst these invitees was Floyd Odlum, a successful financier that had a keen eye for business. Similar to Jackie, he thrived during the depression becoming a millionaire through his reorganization of companies. "His long career left an imprint on virtually every segment of corporate America. It began when he founded the Atlas Corporation in 1923, which specialized in capital formation and management."<sup>67</sup> Odlum nearly avoided the dinner party at Stanton Griffis's house the night he fatefully met Cochran because he was too tired for conversations that would enable "great mental effort."<sup>68</sup>

Floyd said he was too tired, but when Stanton completed the list of guests by telling of a pretty and interesting girl who worked in a store for a living, Floyd said he would go if he could be seated next to her. He told me in later years that he was too tired to face conversation about the latest books or stage plays with experts in their line and felt he could have a comfortable evening, without such great mental effort, by talking with someone down to earth.<sup>69</sup>

To both their delights, the company of each other was a pleasant surprise. The pair talked effortlessly through the cocktail hour and dinner, seeming as if they were old friends. As the dinner party was coming to a close, Odlum decided he was not quite finished with Cochran's company. He invited her to the casino to gamble, something he vowed never to do years prior after losing a substantial amount of money in Europe.<sup>70</sup> However, Jackie must have been worth the risk as he kept giving her more money with each loss that night since she was

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<sup>67</sup> McQuiston, John T. "Floyd B. Odlum, Financier, 84, Dies." *The New York Times*, 18 June 1976, p. 86.

<sup>68</sup> Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 39.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 40.

particularly unlucky at the tables.<sup>71</sup> The evening concluded and he invited Jackie over for a dinner party at his golf club two nights later, Jackie was to be the guest of honor. It was this evening that the two discussed aspirations and business, Jackie did most of the talking and Floyd became enamored with the woman in front of him. She discussed her career in the beauty industry and her idea of starting a new beauty company, with this conversation Floyd offered the idea of flight to reach distributors across the country and increase her competitive advantage.<sup>72</sup> The seed of flight would be planted and come to fruition in the following year, until then Jackie and Floyd's relationship would become more serious but very discrete being the millionaire was still married. This discretion would continue for four years until the pair decided to wed and the spectacle of divorce had passed. "Whether side by side or continents apart, they steadfastly pursued the fame, power, and fortune that they both so highly prized."<sup>73</sup> For Jackie her fame would be solidified through her flight career which started in the summer of 1932.

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<sup>71</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 41.

<sup>73</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 27.



## Training

"I guess one never learns to fly, I think you're always in training."<sup>74</sup>



Figure 3. Young Jackie in Front of a Prop Plane  
Coachella Valley History Museum  
Coachella Valley Historical Society, Inc.

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<sup>74</sup> Jackie Cochran Is Interviewed While at the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado, United States., The United States Air Force Academy, Sept. 1975, [www.criticalpast.com/video/65675032924\\_Jacqueline-Cochran\\_United-States-Air-Force-Academy\\_wall-painting](http://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675032924_Jacqueline-Cochran_United-States-Air-Force-Academy_wall-painting).

Women's presence in aviation at the beginning of the decade was minimal, "In 1930, only about 200, or 1%, of licensed American pilots were women."<sup>75</sup> Cochran would take to the skies in the summer of 1932. At the time, women's place in aviation was uncertain being there was a prejudice of women's capability to handle the machinery.<sup>76</sup> This created discrimination throughout all sectors of aviation, even placing a barrier for women to enter into the field. Often most training facilities were reserved for males and if females were admitted they were held to a higher standard.<sup>77</sup> However, this obstacle did not prevent Cochran's breakthrough into the industry. She would obtain her pilots license in record time, further proving that gender had nothing to do with skill nor piloting a plane; Further demonstrating how Cochran obliterated societal views of women's abilities pertaining to aviation.

By August of 1932, Cochran was still working in the beauty industry and had acquired enough funds to obtain her pilots license. Through her nonstop work ethic, she had accrued a total of six weeks vacation; This vacation time was about to expire and rather than lose it, she figured she could use the time off to pursue a newfound interest. She researched flying schools and decided on Roosevelt Flying school located Long Island, NY. The cost of the course was

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<sup>75</sup> Dall'acqua, Joyce. "Women Pilots Built Their Careers on Fear of Flying: Companies Hired Them to Prove Safety of Air Travel." Los Angeles Times. Los Angeles Times, March 23, 1986. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1986-03-23-mn-5545-story.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Corn, Joseph J., "Making Flying Thinkable": Women Pilots and the Selling of Aviation, 1927-1940," American Quarterly 31 (4) (1979).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

\$495 and upon telling Floyd of her plan he decided to bet her the cost of the course.<sup>78</sup> The bet being that she would not be able to obtain her the license within six weeks, she upped the wager and stated she would do it in three to ensure she could use the other three weeks of vacation for relaxation.<sup>79</sup> The course was designed to be adjusted to the skills and learning competency of the flyer. The initial flight was short, thirty minutes in the air with the instructor, following that the course fee would be paid, and twenty hours of flying time would be guaranteed to the potential pilot. However, the possibility of flying solo or getting a pilot's license was not.

I remember a Chinese boy named Frank whom I saw there. I had met him in Fèrmosa about twenty years later. He had 50 hours already and had never soloed...I went out for the first time on a Saturday morning in August 1932 and bought the course. And I soloed on Monday morning, 48 hours later.<sup>80</sup>

Without knowing what kind of plane she was flying or even what kind of engine it was equipped with, she did know one thing: she wanted to be the greatest pilot male or female.<sup>81</sup> Jackie's flying career was shaped around creating and breaking records; therefore, it is not surprising that her training was record breaking as well. She won the bet against Floyd, within three weeks Jackie had obtained her private pilot's license flying a Fleet Trainer.

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<sup>78</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 71.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Transcript, Jacqueline Cochran Oral Interview: *The Reminiscences*, May 1960, by Kenneth Leish, Electronic Copy, Columbia University Library.

<sup>81</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 72.

With a fresh license and fire burning for more flight time Jackie decided to partake in an air meet located in Montreal, Canada. It had been a little over three weeks since her first flying lesson and she felt now was as good as time as any to put her newly established skills to use. She rented a plane from M. E. Grevenberg who owned a Fairchild 22, he agreed to loan her the plane with a deposit of the plane's value of \$2000.<sup>82</sup> Jackie was able to obtain the money and set off to Canada with a couple air maps she had no idea how to read and simple directions given to her from a stranger she conversed with at Roosevelt Field.<sup>83</sup>

Being she was never educated on the workings of a compass, she relied on natural landmarks to guide her to Canada. Her directions were to follow the Hudson River to Lake Champlain and then circle around the Lake to find a city called Burlington to land for a customs check before entering Canada.<sup>84</sup> From Burlington she set off for Montreal, following a highway to two silos and then staying with the air traffic to ultimately end her first international flight at the air meet.<sup>85</sup> Upon arrival she ran into M. E. Grevenberg, the man that faithfully lent her the plane. He was rather surprised to see her and his plane intact, and hesitantly asked Cochran to fly back to New York with her.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Transcript, Jacqueline Cochran Oral Interview: *The Reminiscences*, May 1960, by Kenneth Leish, Electronic Copy, Columbia University Library.

<sup>86</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 79.

The Fairchild 22 Jackie was piloting lacked the luxuries of numerous instruments. The plane only possessed a compass, tachometer, and air speed. However, Cochran felt confident in her abilities to pilot the Fairchild 22, being that the Fleet Trainer she trained in lacked air speed and a compass. "When it came time for landing, you put the nose down and then got the speed up until the wires started singing. Then you pulled the nose up just enough to stop the singing. This was the method of telling how fast you were going."<sup>87</sup> Her successful landings with this method may have made Jackie overly confident in her abilities and encouraged her to bite off more than she could handle. In route back to New York the weather took a dangerous turn forcing them to land. Thankfully for Jackie's sake she was not alone because if she had been it may have been a very short flight career that ended just as quickly as it started. Grevenberg helped instruct her through the bad weather and the pair safely touched the ground, where they remained for two days. In the moments through the storm, Jackie came to the realization of what a novice pilot she was and how much she still needed to learn.

The West Coast is known for amazing weather, clear sunny skies, and, most importantly to Jackie, was home to one of the best aviation schools in the nation. She decided to pack up her Chevy and drive across the country to attend the Ryan Flying School in San Diego which advertised itself as "America's most

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<sup>87</sup> Transcript, Jacqueline Cochran Oral Interview: *The Reminiscences*, May 1960, by Kenneth Leish, Electronic Copy, Columbia University Library.

modern school for aviation. The aeronautical demands of the future will be many, and the rewards will be great for those who qualify.”<sup>88</sup> This school combined both flight time and classroom lectures to shape a person into an advanced aviator. The flying came effortlessly to Jackie; however, the academics did not. Because of her upbringing in mill towns, nearly all her lessons were learned through life circumstances and she greatly lacked a classroom education aside from her brief time with Miss Bostwick. Her educational struggles from her young life poured over into adulthood and strained her time at Flight school. However, she found a solution through a friend and fellow pilot.

Air Officer Ted Marshall was stationed in San Diego on the West Virginia. He proposed, “if I’d buy my own plane, he and a group of navy pilots we both knew would teach me the navy way.”<sup>89</sup> The “navy way” included daunting tasks out of the ordinary for a private pilot, these tasks included spot and night landings and approaches, accompanied by various other ground work.<sup>90</sup> Unlike her time at the Ryan Flying School, with Lieutenant Ted Marshall she was able to get in the air every day for a minimum of two hours. When the men were transferred to Long Beach Jackie followed and continued her schooling. “At Long Beach, Jackie logged another sixty-five hours in the air and spent more hours on ground

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<sup>88</sup> “Ryan School of Aeronautics, Lindbergh Field, S...” UC San Diego Library | Digital Collections. <https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb3654765z>.

<sup>89</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 85.

<sup>90</sup> Graham, Frederick. “FIRST LADY OF THE AIR LANES; Jacqueline Cochran Tells How She Became a Speed Champion THE FIRST LADY OF THE AIR LANES.” *The New York Times*, September 25, 1938.

school lessons with Marshall, Adams, and her math tutor.”<sup>91</sup> Roughly a year went by and after vigorous training she was able to obtain a limited commercial license. After her training she returned to the East. She sold her trainer plane and purchased her first brand new plane. Jackie had obtained the funds through the sale of the trainer plane and the financial support of her suiter. She had yet to take the new Waco plane for a flight when she received the news of Ted Marshall’s untimely passing while on duty in Hawaii.<sup>92</sup> She decided to fly the Waco to California to attend his funeral. In route somewhere between Rock Springs, Wyoming and Salt Lake City, Utah Jackie realized she was dangerously lost.

My compass was badly off true, due to faulty shielding of the radio, and as a consequence I was flying down the mountain range east of Salt Lake, rather than across it. Worst luck, I got into a down draft of air in a cup in the mountains and could not rise above the crest. After desperately trying to get out of this predicament, I saw a little green spot below and headed for it...I nosed over without damage to the child or myself but the propeller was broken...Two days later, I flew that plane off the same spot and on to Long Beach in time for the funeral.<sup>93</sup>

This event left Jackie keenly aware that her navigational skills were greatly lacking, but she continued to play Russian roulette with the sky. In the Winter of 1934, she was transporting Floyd from New York to Florida when they encountered turbulent weather, she could not turn back because she was never trained on navigation by instrument use; Instead, she decided to fly straight for

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<sup>91</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 34.

<sup>92</sup> Cochran, *The Stars at Noon*, 48.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 49.

forty minutes until the weather cleared. Although they eventually made it safe to Florida, Jackie vowed never to take up another passenger until she mastered blind flying through the use of instruments.<sup>94</sup>

Prior to starting training in blind flying, Jackie focused on obtaining her transport pilots license. In order to do so she sought the help and training from fellow male pilots at the Roosevelt field; Specifically, two men Sandy Willets and Harwood lent her the most aid. Under their instruction for the written as well as flight test, Jackie was able to call herself a transport pilot “sixteen months after her first ever flying lesson.”<sup>95</sup> With this obstacle out of the way she shifted her focus back to learning how to fly by instruments. The first person she reached out to, Wiley Post, turned her down for no good reason according to Cochran. From Post’s rejection, she decided to pursue Wesley Smith.

At this time airmail contracts had been cancelled causing numerous pilots to look for work elsewhere, lucky for Cochran, Wesley was one of these pilots. The training was extensive, after it all the pair would have flown together for roughly 500 hours. He trained her how to fly using the radio beam, this beam allowed for navigation when there were no landmarks present. “It was a sound sent over a certain course through the air by a radio station...almost as if it were a wire strung in the air.”<sup>96</sup> She also learned how to navigate by an artificial horizon and by turn and bank indicators. This training would prove invaluable

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<sup>94</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 97.

<sup>95</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 39.

<sup>96</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 96.



being that the instruments used in her future years of flight, including her time with the military, would evolve from the basis of the old ones allowing Jackie to easily adapt.<sup>97</sup> Most importantly though, her time with Wesley enticed her to enter the MacRobertson Race to Australia in 1934. Jackie would consider this her first major air race, setting aside the fact that she had entered the Women's Pylon race the year prior, which would be her first and only women's race.

"Up to that time air race officials simply did not believe that women pilots could or should compete against male pilots, so women were encouraged to hold their own competitions."<sup>98</sup> Cochran believed differently and refused to participate in women's only races, she wanted to be the best pilot regardless of gender. She championed alongside fellow female pilots such as Amelia Earhart and Louise Thaden for women's admittance into male air races.<sup>99</sup> Her steadfast determination would pave the way for future aviatrixes and allow them to further advance women's involvement in the sky.

### The MacRobertson Race to Australia 1934

The MacRobertson Race to Australia in 1934 was held to honor Melbourne's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The race would begin in Mildenhall and conclude in Melbourne. Sir Macpherson Robertson sponsored the race, donating a prize

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<sup>97</sup> Transcript, Jacqueline Cochran Oral Interview: *The Reminiscences*, May 1960, by Kenneth Leish, Electronic Copy, Columbia University Library.

<sup>98</sup> Oakes, Claudia, "United States Women in Aviation 1930-1939" (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

pool of £15, 000 for the winning pilot. The competition included pilots from all over the world, totaling twenty planes from various countries. "The route stretched over nineteen countries and seven seas. Five compulsory stops were designated for both divisions. Between the five stops (Baghdad, Allahabad, Singapore, Darwin and Charleville) pilots could select their own route."<sup>100</sup> Years prior Jackie and Ted Marshall set the intentions to attempt this race together; however, after his untimely passing she persuaded Wesley Smith to be her co-pilot. Upon first discussing the possibility of competing in the race together he was adamant on his decision not to do so. However, Jackie had a way with words and as history goes, he eventually gave into her persuasion.

Unforeseen issues are expected with any major air race; however, the misfortune that perpetually circulated around this race for Jackie and her co-pilot was rather extreme. The mishaps began in the summer of 1934, when the Northrop Gamma's (her plane to be flown in her first Bendix Transcontinental race) turbo super charger blew up. She had entered this air race with the hopes of winning and using the earnings towards the MacRobertson Race to Australia.<sup>101</sup> Although attempted, the repairs needed proved to be impossible to complete within the two days before the Bendix. This would not be Jackie's year

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<sup>100</sup> "MacRobertson Centenary Air Race." *State Library of NSW*, Scheme=AGLSTERMS.AglsAgent; CorporateName=State Library of New South Wales; Address=Macquarie Street, Sydney, NSW 2000; Contact= 61 2 9273 1414, 13 Dec. 2019, [www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/aviation-australia/macrobertson-centenary-air-race](http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/stories/aviation-australia/macrobertson-centenary-air-race).

<sup>101</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 103.

for the Bendix, but there was still time to make the repairs needed to the plane in order to compete in the MacRobertson Race. With a handful of days to go before the plane was to be transported to England, the repaired engine blew up a second time. It became evident that “the engine couldn’t take the super high speed, and the bearings would blow.”<sup>102</sup> The engine needed to be rebuilt in its entirety. The mechanics worked day in and day out until the engine was finished with four days to spare. They took to the air, flying east for their transport from New York. Jackie was flying with her co-pilot Royal Leonard when she began to feel ill, her body was completely numb and she could hardly lift her arms. Unknowingly to the pilots, carbon monoxide had been leaking through the cockpit causing Jackie to asphyxiate.<sup>103</sup> She was unable to abandon the plane because she could hardly move her body, forcing Royal to make an emergency landing in Arizona.<sup>104</sup> The mechanics were called, and the repairs were done a fourth time. Once again, the plane took off in route for New York, not surprisingly the engine failed yet again. Royal had to make a crash landing in an irrigation ditch, which totaled the plane. After four attempts and failures it seemed as if the MacRobertson Race was finished for Jackie before it even started.

“Bound for London, the starting point of the England to Australia 17,000-mile air derby, Jaqueline Cochran took off for New York today in her new racing

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

plane.”<sup>105</sup> Navigating through countless obstacles Jackie was able to obtain a plane. Her relentlessness procured her a plane within the final days before the race; Undoubtedly, the connections she had attained through Floyd Odlum assisted in the matter and through his and Mabel Willebrandt’s funding she was able to purchase the Granville R-6H QED.<sup>106</sup> The plane was assembled and modified on the transport ship to England. Against all odds by 6:30 AM on October 20, 1934 Jackie and Wesley Smith became airborne in the great race.

Keeping the momentum of mishaps going, the pair of pilots nearly had to bail out twice. The first being for a mislabeled gas switch which caused them to nearly run out of fuel, the second reason was a faulty landing flap.<sup>107</sup> Each time Jackie refused to jump out of the plane for two reasons; Upon attempting to remove her canopy she found it was jammed so she could not escape the plane even if she wanted to, she also stated that “this is my airplane and I am going to get it to the ground.”<sup>108</sup> Against all odds, she yet again defied death or even a mere injury and was able to crash land the plane at a restricted military airport in Bucharest, Romania.

Her team was not the only ones to withdraw from the race due to mechanical failures, five other teams confronted issues and were forced out of

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<sup>105</sup> “Miss Cochrane Starts Hop Here.” *The New York Times*, September 30, 1934.

<sup>106</sup> Cochrane, D. “Women in Aviation and Space History.” <https://airandspace.si.edu/explore-and-learn/topics/women-in-aviation/cochran.cfm>.

<sup>107</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 112.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

the race. Of the twenty planes that started only eleven finished and concluded in Melbourne.<sup>109</sup> Jackie's first major air race abruptly concluded in Bucharest, being this was an unplanned destination she had nothing but her flight suit and a compact to powder her nose. This simply would not do in her eyes, "Miss Jacqueline Cochran hurried away from the airfield here to buy herself a dress before the shops closed. She was wearing a pretty light blue flying suit which well became her slim figure."<sup>110</sup> Statements such as that were a common portrayal of female pilots, demeaning their feats and the obstacles they overcame in flight. However, Cochran would use this to her advantage to further her exposure in the press. "Women pilots exploited the feminine to their advantage...manipulated the symbols of domesticity and femininity to expand women's role in the world."<sup>111</sup> Female pilots, such as Cochran, would further the advancement of women's role in aviation through their embracement of their femininity to slowly break the barriers of gender discrimination within the industry.

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<sup>109</sup> "MISS COCHRAN OUT; HER PLANE FAULTY; Quits Race at Bucharest Because of Danger of Night Landings at Small Fields. WOODS DELAYED IN ATHENS Stack and Turner at Le Bourget -- Gilman at Marseilles With Engine Trouble." *The New York Times*, October 21, 1934.

<sup>110</sup> "Miss Cochran Buys a Dress." *The New York Times*, October 21, 1934.

<sup>111</sup> Corn, Joseph J., "Making Flying Thinkable": Women Pilots and the Selling of Aviation, 1927-1940," *American Quarterly* 31 (4) (1979), 567.

## Jacqueline Cochran Cosmetics



Figure 4. Portrait of Jackie Cochran  
Coachella Valley History Museum  
Coachella Valley Historical Society, Inc.

Jackie Cochran established a place within the male dominated world of aviation; However, she never swayed away from her femininity. She held steadfast to maintain her beauty and sought to empower other women to do the same. “Dorothy Gray, Helena Rubenstein, Elizabeth Arden, Jacqueline Cochran- they were the women who founded our cosmetic industry back in the 30s ...all

pioneers in many ways; formulas for instance were nonexistent.”<sup>112</sup> Cochran established Jacqueline Cochran Cosmetics in 1935 starting with an office space off Fifth Avenue in New York City.<sup>113</sup> “Floyd arranged the lease of the laboratory...and Jackie hired a cosmetics chemist and a perfume consultant to teach her the characteristics and availability of the ingredients that she would need.”<sup>114</sup> To launch the products she established a boutique in Chicago, and then used “wings to beauty” to travel across the country landing accounts at major department stores such as Pogue’s and Halle Brothers.<sup>115</sup> Her selling technique was simple, she traveled across the US creating connections and would recruit women to expand the business. Jackie compared the technique to the later brand of Avon Cosmetics.

The products included in her line ranged from cosmetics and skincare to hair dyes and perfumes. The most popular products were Flowing Velvet, a greaseless night cream which was the first of its kind, the perk up stick which included six different products into one, something Jackie designed for her busy lifestyle.<sup>116</sup> “It’s a woman’s duty to be presentable as her circumstances of time and purse permit. Fifteen minutes a day, sometimes that’s all it takes, but looking good is so emotionally satisfying that you shouldn’t ever take it lightly. I didn’t.”<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 116.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>114</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 50.

<sup>115</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 119.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

The business had substantial success throughout the Depression and expanded over the course of the following decades. In later years the company expanded to a six-story building before evolving into Jacqueline Cochran, Inc.; Eventually, the company was sold in 1963.<sup>118</sup>

From the ground up Jackie became a cosmetics authority. She was awarded Businesswoman of the Year in 1953 and 1954 and pioneered the cosmetics industry to break way into what it has become today. It is important to note that, "with the end of World War II, men returned to the United States and to their jobs, which had temporarily been assumed by women. Women now out of work turned toward the home and domestic activity."<sup>119</sup> However, Cochran continued to shatter traditional gender roles; all the while, entering races, running tests, and breaking records.

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<sup>118</sup> Smith-Daugherty, *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*, 59.

<sup>119</sup> Catalano, Christina (2002) "Shaping the American Woman: Feminism and Advertising in the 1950s," *Constructing the Past*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 6.



## Races and Records Pre-WWII



Figure 5. Portrait of Jackie Cochran  
Coachella Valley History Museum  
Coachella Valley Historical Society, Inc.

The Bendix Transcontinental Air Race was a prestigious air race reserved for the best pilots in the world. The race was held in the United States every year over Labor Day weekend beginning in the year of 1931. The winner would fly

from Los Angeles to Cleveland in record time.<sup>120</sup> The air race was not just for the advancement of pilots, but more importantly the advancement of aviation as a whole. “The advancements made for the competition had a direct impact on the future of commercial aviation.”<sup>121</sup> By the race of 1934, the Bendix had yet to allow an aviatrix to participate without restrictions, Jackie would change this.

Never one to sway away from a challenge, Cochran’s persuasion alongside various connections in high places changed the Bendix entrance requirements for the year of 1934. She had acquired a plane, the Northrop Gamma which was the same one to be used in the MacRobertson Race to Australia. As stated previously, the engine blew up multiple times and inhibited her from participating in the air race. Her only condolment was knowing she opened the door into race and thought she would be back to win it the following year.

For the 1935 Bendix her plane was a Northrop Gamma enhanced with an experimental engine, a “Sai-G with 400 horsepower and a controllable pitch propeller.”<sup>122</sup> Prior to the race this engine was causing the plane to vibrate uncontrollably, after numerous attempts to solve the problem representatives from Northrop requested her withdrawal from the race for her safety. Her

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<sup>120</sup> Welch, Rosanne. *Encyclopedia of Women in Aviation and Space*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998.

<sup>121</sup> “Vincent Bendix Trophy.” National Air and Space Museum. Accessed April 8, 2020. [https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/vincent-bendix-trophy/nasm\\_A19850368000](https://airandspace.si.edu/collection-objects/vincent-bendix-trophy/nasm_A19850368000).

<sup>122</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 54.

response surprised them when she questioned if they were going to blame the plane in press reports for the reasoning behind her withdrawal. When the company refused, so did she. A little after midnight and with horrible weather against her she took off from the Union Air Terminal in Burbank, California. She flew as long as the plane allowed before being forced down in Kingman, Arizona, due to an overheated engine and a leaking gasoline valve. Rather than attempt any repairs, she withdrew from the race stating that “she was tired and decided to quit the race before something happened.”<sup>123</sup> Although she withdrew from the race her point had been made and she felt she had proved women had a place within the race.

Jackie planned to enter her Gamma in the 1936 Bendix; however, two weeks before the race the plane was forced down twice due to her engine catching fire over Indianapolis. Rather than abandoning her investment she brought it to the ground intact but no longer functional for the Bendix.<sup>124</sup> For the third time, Jackie’s attempt at the Bendix was unsuccessful. The fourth time, however, was her charm.

Before her fourth attempt at the Bendix, she added two new women’s international air records to her belt. “Another women’s flying record, her second in a week, was hung up by Jacqueline Cochran Odum, a pretty aviatrix.”<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Graham, Frederick. “FIRST LADY OF THE AIR LANES; Jacqueline Cochran Tells How She Became a Speed Champion THE FIRST LADY OF THE AIR LANES.” *The New York Times*, September 25, 1938.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> “New Air Record Set for Women in the West.” *Twin City News*. July 29, 1937.

Pretty but powerful, she flew roundtrip from Los Angeles to San Francisco at an average speed of 203.89 mph setting a new average speed record. A week later, she set a new 100-kilometer speed record averaging 199 mph with her flight from Inglewood Air Center to Garden Grove, California.<sup>126</sup> The plane she used to set these new records was a Beechcraft D-17W, the same plane she would enter the 1937 Bendix Transcontinental race with a slight modification of a 600-horsepower motor.

A little after midnight on September 3, 1937, Jackie took off in the Bendix Race. She was the only woman entered into the competition this year, so she was determined to finish at all costs.<sup>127</sup> For her flight Jackie “wore dark blue linen slacks and a blouse open at the throat, with blue suede shoes and a wilted yellow California rose in her buttonhole.”<sup>128</sup> Her flight occurred with minimal hiccups and she arrived in Cleveland in ten hours, twenty eight minutes, and eight seconds, placing third overall in the race. She received \$5,500 for placing third and \$2,500 as a special prize award for being the only female entrant.<sup>129</sup> From Cleveland, she took to the air again headed for New York with the intention of setting a new transcontinental record. However, she was forced to land in Pittsburgh because her plane’s gas line could not move the gas to the main

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 146.

<sup>128</sup> “Wreath for Jackie, She’s No Horse.” *The Akron Beacon Journal*, September 4, 1937.

<sup>129</sup> “National Air Meet.” *The Akron Beacon Journal*, September 4, 1937.

tank.<sup>130</sup> None the less, she achieved one of two goals and wasn't about to stop there.

Towards the end of 1937, Jackie began to work with plane designer Alexander Seversky. He granted her the opportunity to pilot his Seversky Pursuit plane, which was a lethal machine. "Cochran became the first woman to fly military aircraft."<sup>131</sup> Surprisingly to the men of the day, she handled the machinery as good as them and in some cases even better; breaking a male held air speed record from New York to Miami in 4 hours, 12 minutes, and 27.2 seconds.<sup>132</sup> Jackie told reporters that "the weather was perfect, the plane is really awfully nice and everything was gorgeous."<sup>133</sup> Following this, she broke her own 100 kilometer speed record during the Miami Air races and in September broke the world's unlimited speed record for women while flying in Detroit, Michigan. She was still piloting the Seversky Pursuit and traveled at a top speed of 304 mph over a three-kilometer course, Jackie exceeded the previous record of 276.5 mph held by Helen Boucher of France.<sup>134</sup> The year of 1937 transformed Jackie from a pilot to a renown aviatrix. For her accomplishments during this time she was awarded the Clifford B. Harmon Women's Trophy for general aviation promotion.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Smith-Daugherty, *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*, 38.

<sup>132</sup> "New American Mark Set by Woman Flier." *The Miami Herald*, December 10, 1937.

<sup>133</sup> Corley, Pauline. "Jacqueline Cochran Is Modest after Smashing Speed Record." *The Miami Herald*, December 4, 1937.

<sup>134</sup> "Flies 304 M.P.H. to Set Women's Records." *St. Louis Globe Democrat*, September 22, 1937.

These successes were prominent in her aviation career, but Jackie still felt as if there was something escaping her: The Vincent Bendix Trophy.

Again, Jackie was the only female contestant in the 1938 Bendix Transcontinental race. Her competition was fierce with ten experienced male pilots who all wanted the same thing Jackie did, a win. She took off from Burbank in her Seversky Pursuit at 3 AM on September 3.

After the first hour the weather gets worse by the minute. Even all regular airline flights are cancelled soon after my takeoff because of this storm system...I need oxygen. A tube from the oxygen tank leads into a pipe stem which I hold between by teeth...Over Arizona I finally hit the soup...The whole state is so bad I can't get any radio reception...It becomes a questions of instrument flying by compass. Nothing. Not a sound from a soul for 2,042 miles, for 8 hours and 10 minutes. My average speed: 249.774 miles per hour...The engine stops. I am at 23,000 feet. My windshield is still loaded with ice, and I'm holding the stick with all the muscular control I can muster...I try to switch to that belly tank. It might start the engine...I go into a spiral...I put the ship into a shallow dive and straighten it out coming out of the dive...Then I push it over so the empty wing is lower than the full one. By keeping the empty wing lower I can get gas from the full wing to drain toward the empty one...I can empty both wings dry. But it's not easy flying.<sup>135</sup>

Upon arrival in Cleveland Jackie was utterly exhausted but found the energy to pose for the press and spectators. She was greeted by a standing ovation, but before she exited her Pursuit plane and greeted the crowd, she freshened up her complexion and made sure her hair was in place. Cochran had won the Bendix Transcontinental Race with a flight time of eight hours, ten minutes, and three seconds. This would grant her first place but be 16 minutes too much to set a

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<sup>135</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 163-164.

new record for the race.<sup>136</sup> She found Floyd, posed for photos, and shook the hands of a few prominent people but she wasn't finished flying yet. She took off again and headed for New York. With a total flight time of ten hours, seven minutes, and ten seconds Jackie set a new transcontinental record for women, destroying the previous record by three and a half hours.<sup>137</sup> "I used to tell people that I would stop racing once I won the Bendix. But I couldn't. I guess racing was in my blood from the beginning."<sup>138</sup>

Jackie would conclude the decade by obtaining three more records for speed and altitude, she would also make the first blind instrument landing by a woman pilot.<sup>139</sup> For the blind landing, "Miss Cochran depended entirely on radio-controlled instruments to make several perfect landings."<sup>140</sup> This event was not to simply enhance Jackie's records but more importantly was to be used as a test a system for instrument only landing; Because of Jackie's success, the system was adopted by the navy.<sup>141</sup>

By this point it had become undeniable that Jackie Cochran had claimed the throne as America's "queen of the air."<sup>142</sup> Shattering traditional gender roles and changing societal views of women's abilities pertaining to aviation. Gloria

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<sup>136</sup> "Aviatrix Wins Bendix Race, Sets Flight Mark." *Abilene Reporter*, September 4, 1938.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 166.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> "Woman Pilot Lands Blind." *Reno Gazette*, August 9, 1939.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Rich, *Jackie Cochran: Pilot in the Fastest Lane*, 69.

Steinem states that, "I have met brave women who are exploring the outer edge of human possibility with no history to guide them, and with the courage to make themselves vulnerable that I find moving beyond words."<sup>143</sup> Cochran was doing just that and ultimately paving the way for the next generation of aviatrixes.

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<sup>143</sup> Steinem, Gloria. *Moving Beyond Words: Essays on Age, Rage, Sex, Power, Money, Muscles: Breaking the Boundaries of Gender*. New York, NY: Open Road Media, 2012.



## CHAPTER THREE

### Heading into the 1940's and WWII



Figure 6. "Miss Jacqueline Cochran, Director of WASP."  
Image Number 4A-23096-K1210, Record Group 342,  
National Archives and Records Administration

Through the next decade Cochran would shift her focus to the war effort. She strongly believed that women had a place in aviation within the military to relieve the burden for the American male pilots. She would continue to face societal gender prejudices that were still strongly prevailing at the time.<sup>144</sup> Cochran fought hard and ultimately prevailed with the creation of the WASP program in 1943, which she was appointed director of. The WASPs “established an enviable record of accomplishment in the field of aviation. They provided undeniable proof of women’s abilities to handle aircraft, any and every aircraft flown at the time.”<sup>145</sup> Once again, her contributions furthered women’s advancements in aviation and paved the way for future generations of female pilots; while continually shattering traditional gender roles and changing societal views of women’s abilities pertaining to aviation.

The tide would change in Europe in 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, previously Germany was in a state of disarray still recovering from the harshness of the Versailles Treaty. This weakened state gave Hitler a stage to stand on and rally the people. By March 17, 1935 Compulsory German Military forces were created to work for the federal government and help rebuild Germany, and Hitler was getting ready to take over more living space.<sup>146</sup> In the Summer of 1936, the Berlin Olympics occurred, and by the end of the Olympics it

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<sup>144</sup> Cole, Jean Hascall. *Women Pilots of World War II*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995, 4.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>146</sup> Doenecke, Justus D., and John Edward. Wilz. *From Isolation to War: 1931-1941*. Chichester: Wiley, 2015.

became clear what the Nazi Party wanted. This led to the Munich Agreement on September 30, 1938 with the hopes of “peace for our time” declared by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. This agreement allowed for the German annexation of the Sudetenland.<sup>147</sup>

On August 23, 1939, Russia and Germany entered into a non-aggression pact. This pact was a ten-year agreement not to attack one another, they also sought to split Poland by attacking from both sides being that Poland didn’t have the manpower nor modern artillery. Poland was ripped in half and put on display for the world to see in order to instill fear within opposing nations, this seemed to be a reoccurring theme especially being that this followed the “Night of Broken Glass” which was on November 9, 1938. In the upcoming years Germany would withdraw from their alliance with Russia engaging in Operation Barbarossa on June 22, 1941, the Largest military excursion in the history of humankind.<sup>148</sup> Nazi’s initially dominated the Soviets in battle but then winter occurred causing German soldiers to freeze to death. This created a turning point in the war.<sup>149</sup>

The US begins talks of a possible draft, leading to the selective service act for any man between the age of 21 and 25. In the same year the Lend Lease Act was passed on March 11, 1941, granting countries the ability to purchase supplies from the US. In the public’s opinion, this was a better scenario than going to war. The Atlantic Charter was written on August 14, 1941 which

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Doenecke, *From Isolation to War: 1931-1941*.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

“provided a broad statement of U.S. and British war aims”<sup>150</sup> mainly aimed at stopping Nazi Germany. While Germany became an increasing threat, Japan was growing in power as well.

Japan sought to erase western colonization and influence, beginning with the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, leading to the U.S. passing of the H.L. Stimson Doctrine of 1932.<sup>151</sup> This further agitated Japan and ignited a path to war with the Selective Sanctions that restricted the US from selling tanks or aircrafts to Japan; however, they kept sending the materials to build them. Japan’s aggression towards China only increased with events such as the Rape of Nanking, which killed as many as 350,000 men, women, and children.<sup>152</sup> By 1940 Japan enters into the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. Following this, relations between Japan and the U.S. only intensify and by November 26, 1941 Japan advances across Pacific for their plan of attacking Pearl Harbor. The attack on Pearl Harbor occurs on December 7, 1941 and the next day the United States declared war on Japan.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> U.S. Department of State. Accessed March 19, 2019.

<https://history.state.gov/milestones/1937-1945/atlantic-conf>.

<sup>151</sup> Doenecke, *From Isolation to War: 1931-194*.

<sup>152</sup> Lu, Suping, ed. *A Mission under Duress: The Nanjing Massacre and Post-Massacre Social Conditions Documented by American Diplomats*. Lanham, MD: UPA, 2010.

<sup>153</sup> Hess, Gary R. *The United States at War, 1941-1945*. Wiley, 2014.

### “U.S. Aviatix Flies Bomber Across Atlantic”

By the final months of 1939, Jackie was at the center of the aviation world, widely respected as well as trusted. Through her flying feats and her husband Floyd she had made friends in very high places; During the month of September, she wrote First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt with the hopes of conveying the role women could play concerning aviation during wartime and the immense benefits it would offer to America as a whole. Her words were as follows:

In the field of aviation, the real “bottle neck” in the long run is likely to be trained pilots. Women could be used effectively in all sorts of helpful back of the lines work, as for instance, in flying ambulance planes, courier planes, and commercial and transport planes; thereby releasing male pilots for combat duty. This requires organization and not at the time of emergency but in advance. We have about 650 licensed women pilots in this country. Most of them would be of little use today, but most of them could be of great use in a few months hence if properly trained and organized. And if they had some official standing or patriotic objective there would be thousands more women pilots than there are now.<sup>154</sup>

Jackie steadfastly believed that women pilots would prove to be one of the strongest resources the government could utilize. She had already heard word that other countries such as Germany, Russia, England and France were utilizing women.<sup>155</sup> Her assertions were not wrong, England had the “ATTA girls, Russia’s Night Witches, and Germany had women in the Luftwaffe. She was determined to arrange a force of women pilots such as those but better for the United States.

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<sup>154</sup> “Women Pilots with the AFF 1941-1944 No. 55.” Air Force Historical Research Agency. Army Air Forces Historical Studies.  
<https://www.afhra.af.mil/Portals/16/documents/Studies/51-100/AFD-090529-109.pdf>.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

However, Jackie would need to practice patience and play the political game in the coming year to further her agenda.

In 1940, Jackie became the first woman to serve on the Collier Trophy Committee, this committee selected the pilots that would receive recognition for their advancement and excellence in aviation the year prior.<sup>156</sup> It was at one of the luncheons hosted by the committee that Jackie received an opportunity to get involved first hand in the war effort, with some luck she was seated next to General Henry Arnold and Clayton Knight. “Mr. Knight was actively recruiting American pilots to fly for the British Ferry Command.”<sup>157</sup> There was a substantial need for pilots to transfer planes made in the US overseas to Britain to aid in the war effort. General Arnold came up with a plan to further Jackie’s career of firsts and propagandize a flight all in one, he suggested to have Jackie pilot one of the bombers needed for transport across the Atlantic to England.

Jackie jumped at the opportunity because no woman had piloted a Lockheed Hudson as of yet, and it would also demonstrate the desperate need for pilots and the capability of women to address this desperation.<sup>158</sup> In order to make this flight a reality Jackie had to jump through countless hoops and obstacles, mainly because of her gender. The male pilots of the time were weary of the notion to allow a woman to pilot a bomber. However, it pays to have

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<sup>156</sup> “Collier Nomination Guidelines.” NAA. Accessed April 9, 2020. <https://naa.aero/awards/awards-and-trophies/collier-trophy/collier-nomination-guidelines>.

<sup>157</sup> Smith-Daugherty, *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*, 68.

<sup>158</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 168.

friends in high places and the decision was made to allow it. Now all she had to do was prove she was strong enough and mentally competent to handle such large machinery. Facing one last obstacle, she set off for Montreal for an excruciating number of flight tests over the course of several days.

In Montreal, she met with the test conductors representing Atfero which was the organization which ferried the bombers to Britain.<sup>159</sup> Jackie passed the tests with flying colors aside from one minor discrepancy. Over the course of several days her arm had become sore from controlling a stiff hand break used for take-offs and landings, on her final descent she asked Captain Cipher “to get us from the runway to the hanger.”<sup>160</sup> This turned out to be a detrimental mistake. After the tests concluded the findings released were that Cochran passed with a slight stipulation. Being that she had asked for help on the final descent, they found it evident that she could not handle the hand break in all scenarios, because of this she would not be granted the right to take off nor land the bomber but would still hold the title of captain. In her autobiography, Jackie states she was titled captain; however, in numerous newspaper articles concerning the flight she was titled first officer.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, bitter and feeling robbed, Jackie accepted the partial win and prepared to become the first woman to fly a bomber across the Atlantic.

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<sup>159</sup> “U.S. Aviatrix to Ferry Bomber to Britain.” *Salt Lake Telegram*, June 16, 1941.

<sup>160</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 170.

<sup>161</sup> “Jaqueline Cochran to Fly in Bomber to Britain.” *Detroit Free Press*, June 17, 1941.

On June 17, 1941 Jackie took the seat of co-pilot and first officer in a “an American built Hudson bomber.”<sup>162</sup> Although she did not pilot the bomber for take-off or landing, she piloted it the entire time it was in the air, describing the flight as “a wonderful trip, completely without incident.”<sup>163</sup> Newspaper articles of the period gave her credit for her flight but did not hesitate to mention her outfit or her lavish collection of undergarments she brought along with her, seemingly belittling the fact that she had just broken a barrier for women. In one article describing her “as a 32-year-old brown haired little aviatrix” and in another “a slim fair-haired Jacqueline Cochran.”<sup>164</sup> Demeaning or not, Jackie most likely welcomed these descriptions because she was proud of her femininity and thought of it as a badge of honor.

Piloting the bomber to England was a mere task in her grandeur plan of information collection. Upon arrival, she promptly got to work for her research in Britain’s use of women pilots. Cochran specifically focused on women that were involved in ferrying planes and the role being played in other branches of the air service.<sup>165</sup> She met with various women pilots, one of which being the captain of the Air Transport Auxiliary Pauline Gower. Through countless conversations over the course of two and a half months, Jackie felt she had gathered enough intel to

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<sup>162</sup> “Miss Cochran Flies Bomber to Great Britain.” *La Crosse Tribune*, June 20, 1941.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Littlefield, Joan. “Miss Cochran Belittles Feat of Atlantic Flight.” *The Berkshire Eagle*. June 24, 1941.

<sup>165</sup> “U.S. Aviatrix to Ferry Bomber to Britain.” *Salt Lake Telegram*, June 16, 1941.



take back to the United States and convince the government of the beneficial use of women pilots. She returned to the United States and promptly met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Upon this meeting Jackie spoke with the President and First Lady regarding the stark need to begin to utilize women in the war effort. Whatever was said the President agreed with because in the following days he arranged numerous meetings for Jackie with men such as the Assistant Secretary of War Robert Lovett, General Arnold and General Robert Olds.<sup>166</sup> Her viewpoints were not met with the same urgency she held and was instead assigned the task of joining forces with the British Air Transport Auxiliary.

#### British Air Transport Auxiliary

Cochran would not get the American women flying force she so desperately wanted quite yet, instead she would take American women pilots abroad and help the war effort in Britain.

Today Jackie Cochran is holding down the biggest wartime aviation job ever tackled by a woman...She had flown to England to volunteer the services of a squadron of 25 women pilots to serve with the British Air Transport Auxiliary in ferrying war planes from British factories to military airfields. The full story of Flight Captain Jacqueline Cochran's A.T.A. war role is a story that will have to remain an almost dead secret until the Axis is finally crushed. But this much I can reveal: Jackie tackled this job with the thoroughness that has characterized her every other effort.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Smith-Daugherty, *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*, 72.

<sup>167</sup> Tewson, Orton. "An Attic Salt Shaker." *Star Phoenix*. December 30, 1942.

For Jackie, this project was not about proving her worthiness as pilot, that had already been established; Instead, she saw this venture as a chance to prove her skills in an administrative and organizational captain's role.<sup>168</sup> She was given the green light late in 1941 and she began the recruitment of women pilots for England. She telephoned women from all across the country and flew the most promising selections to New York to be interviewed by her personally, Cochran even offered her Cosmetic companies' office to hold the interviews in.<sup>169</sup> After the interviews, 25 women were selected to go on for training; These women all held a minimum of 300 hours of flight time, were between the age of 21 and 35, and possessed a high school diploma.

Before the women were shipped off to Canada, they required a medical examination as well as a flight test given in Montreal. These tests would be at the same location Jackie partook in hers a year prior before her bomber flight across the Atlantic. Once this step was completed the women headed for England to pilot military planes. "The women made approximately five flights a day and flew 121 different types of aircraft, including the British Hurricanes and Spitfires."<sup>170</sup> The first round of recruits demonstrated an immense amount of promise and skill leading Jackie to arrange a second division to be brought over by June 1942.

The women that were brought over were participating in making history being that they were the first of their sex to pilot these various types of military

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<sup>168</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 183.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 185.

<sup>170</sup> Smith-Daugherty, *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*, 75.

aircraft.<sup>171</sup> The training offered through their service with the ATA proved invaluable, not only were they learning certain flying techniques with various aircrafts but also learning how to navigate during wartime. The women were not allowed to mark their destinations on a map, instead “they must memorize the spot and hope to hit it right.”<sup>172</sup> Multiple destinations per day would need to be memorized and, on most days, this went off without a hitch. The only American woman to be killed during this program was Mary Nicholson, who crashed due to a loss of the plane’s propeller.<sup>173</sup> “By September 1942, the ATA had flown 30,000,000 miles and delivered 100,000 aircraft.”<sup>174</sup> After numerous months abroad she felt it was time to return to the United States and create a women’s flying force on home soil. She returned home feeling confident with her success in England and felt that American girls were ready and able to “fly for their country.”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>172</sup> McNulty, Henry. “More American Women May Soon Be Ferrying to England.” *Tampa Bay Times*, June 30, 1942.

<sup>173</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 192.

<sup>174</sup> Smith-Daugherty, *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*, 77.

<sup>175</sup> “At Last U.S. Women Get Their Chance.” *Scrantonian Tribune*. January 18, 1942.

The WASPS: “Women Fly in this War.”<sup>176</sup>

The success of Jackie’s participation with the ATA and the American women pilots began to convince high ranking members of the military that women could be utilized in the United States as well. However, not all generals believed that her plan was adequate for the time, one of her combatants was General Harold George. He strategically used Jackie’s absence while she was abroad and General Arnold’s absence due to illness to set up a women’s ferrying service titled the Women’s Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFS). Much to the unpleasant surprise of both Jackie and General Arnold, another woman was granted the director position over the flying squadron, pilot Nancy Love.<sup>177</sup>

Nancy Love was an experienced American pilot of twelve years and married to a Lieutenant Colonel in the Air Transport Command. Through connections such as her husband she was granted a platform to express her ideas on for a women’s ferrying service. On September 15, 1942, Love received a memorandum stating the plan to hire civilian women pilots which she would be authorized to appoint as Chief Woman Pilot.<sup>178</sup> The qualifications for the women pilots would be as follows:

- A. American Citizenship
- B. Must be between the ages of 21 and 35

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<sup>176</sup> Smithsonian Institution Archives, CC-344500-02, Jacqueline Cochran Files, Women Fly This War.

<sup>177</sup> Williams, Vera S. *WASPs: Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II*. Osceola, USA: Motorbooks International Publishers & Wholesalers Inc., 1994.

<sup>178</sup> “Memorandum, Hiring Civilian Women Pilots.” NARA—Jacqueline Cochran Papers. [Online version, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/12004207>, National Archives and Records Administration.]

- C. Must have a high school education
- D. Must have CAA Commercial Certificate
- E. Must have 500 certified hours
- F. Must hold CAA 200 H.P. rating
- G. Must have two letters of recommendation outlining applicant's experience and qualifications from former employers or prominent people in the community who can easily be contacted.
- H. Must have 50 hours in the last 12 months<sup>179</sup>

The WAFS were to solely be a ferrying command based on civilian service without military recognition or benefits. The women would be paid \$3000 annually and reserved to domestic flying. It was also made clear that this program was an experiment and could be terminated at any time.<sup>180</sup> A stark contrast to the ideas Jackie had implemented in the year prior. This was one of the reasons that Love and General George acted swiftly before her return, disregarding her contributions and involvement. "They felt Cochran's ideas were too ambitious to implement in the short term."<sup>181</sup> However, true to Jackie's character she did not fold easy and refused to be pushed out of something she had been campaigning for since her letter to the First Lady Elenore Roosevelt.

Persistent in the notion that more women would be needed in the war effort than Nancy Love's WAFS could provide, Jackie championed for a training force completely separated from Love's squadron.<sup>182</sup> General Arnold swiftly agreed, and the pair established the Women's Flying Training Detachment

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Wilson, Anne F. "No Fuss, Feathers for Boss of WAF Squadron, Mrs. Love." *The Columbus Telegram*, September 18, 1942.

<sup>181</sup> Williams, *WASPs: Women Airforce Service Pilots of World War II*, 21.

<sup>182</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 198.

(WFTD) which Jackie would be the sole director of. “I was to train 500 women pilots, though that number would later increase to more than 1,000. I was pleased.”<sup>183</sup> The WFTD was established on November 16, 1942 and located at Howard Hughes Airport in Houston, Texas. Jackie would begin the detachment with 25 women of which would hold a commercial license and minimum 200 hours of flight time.<sup>184</sup> Although a training detachment, the tasks performed by these women were invaluable.

In addition to ferrying, testing and delivering planes for repair, the WFTD also performed check flights, put flying time on new engines, towed targets for anti-aircraft gunnery practice, flew searchlight tracking missions, and instructed male pilot cadets.<sup>185</sup>

The WFTD and WAFS experiment proved to be highly successful and as the need for non-combat pilots grew so did the two programs. On August 5, 1943 Cochran won the drawn-out battle, the operational group and training unit merged into a new entity titled the Women’s Air Force Service Pilots (WASPS).

The WASPS included all women pilots from the WFTD, WAFS, and various other flying services within the Army Air Forces. Cochran championed for these women to have rightful recognition as members of the Armed Service, but she was not successful and the women would be considered civilian workers.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>184</sup> “Women in the United States Army.” Women in the U.S. Army | The United States Army. Accessed April 13, 2020.  
<https://www.army.mil/women/history/pilots.html>.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> “WASP Adopted as Official Title for Women Pilots.” *The Nebraska State Journal*, August 29, 1943.

None the less, she was pleased because the enlarged women's pilot program was under her control. Cochran became "Director of Women Pilots, in Headquarters Army Air Forces, Washington, D.C.; Directing both the training and operations."<sup>187</sup> Nancy Love, was assigned a backseat position as the executive for the WASP ferrying operation, this was a prestigious position but a demotion from her last title held for the WAFS. Jackie would continue to expand the program, breaking the traditional mold of women's role in a wartime society and bring women to the frontline of the war effort.

By September 1943, the first women that officially held the WASP title arrived at Avenger field. Throughout the program there would be over 25,000 applicants, of which 1,830 would be accepted, and 1,074 women would be gifted their wings after full completion of the program.<sup>188</sup> These women invaluablely added to the war effort through roughly 60 million miles of flying for the Army Air Forces over the 16 month duration of the program.

The WASPs performed ferrying, target towing, tracking and searchlight missions, simulated strafing, smoke laying and other chemical missions, radio control flying, administrative and utility flying. The WASPs flew during operational duties nearly every type of airplane used by the AAF, from small primary trainer to the Superfortress (B-29), including the Mustang, Thunderbolt, B-17, B-26, and C-52.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> "Women in the United States Army." Women in the U.S. Army | The United States Army. <https://www.army.mil/women/history/pilots.html>.

<sup>189</sup> "Final Report on Women Pilot Program." NARA—Jacqueline Cochran Papers. [Online version, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/12004155>, National Archives and Records Administration.]

Although these women were performing brave duties and serving so the men would be freed to tackle other tasks, numerous accounts from WASP members state that they were often faced with discrimination and sabotage from their male counterparts. In the audio documentary, *The Home Front: Life in America During World War II*, one WASP states that her engine's fuel line was deliberately filled with rags to stop the gas flow, others found acid in parachutes, and plane's tires slashed.<sup>190</sup> While the women faced discrimination on the airfields, Jackie fought for them off the field, facing various Generals and Congress.

Throughout the program Jackie fought for these women to be granted their rightful military status for the duties they were performing but she was constantly confronted with "the hassle of breaking such new ground for women in what had been a highly prized corner of a man's world."<sup>191</sup> She persisted on, and through her efforts and General Arnold's "Costello Bill" was presented to Congress to give the WASP members the status of commissioned officers in the army.<sup>192</sup> However, on "June 21, 1944 the bill was defeated by 19 votes despite vigorous lobbying efforts."<sup>193</sup> By December of the same year, the Women's Airforce Service Pilots program would be deactivated. Jackie would send the WASP a final report stating:

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<sup>190</sup> Waxman, Olivia B. "World War II Female Pilots Claim Sabotage in New Documentary." <https://time.com/4923054/world-war-ii-sugar-engines/>.

<sup>191</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 210.

<sup>192</sup> "Order of Discontinuance for WASP Training Program." *Intelligencer Journal*. June 27, 1944.

<sup>193</sup> "Women in the United States Army." Women in the U.S. Army | The United States Army. <https://www.army.mil/women/history/pilots.html>.



I felt sure when this organization was in its infancy that, given an opportunity, women could prove themselves capable in any situation they might be called upon to face. You girls have corroborated my statement many times over... Thus it is with deep regret that I found it necessary to recommend inactivation of the entire program, for I know how sorry you girls will be to have to divorce yourselves from Army flying. But how grateful we can be to know that our disbandment is the result of unexpectedly low combat losses; and how great is our satisfaction to know that over 1,000 women have learned to fly 'the Army way'."<sup>194</sup>

Jackie played a momentous role in the creation of the first female flying force in American history.<sup>195</sup> The WASPs would not receive rightful recognition and veteran status benefits until November 23, 1977, when President Carter would sign the Bill presented into law.

After the disbandment of the WASPs, Jackie was not finished with the war quite yet. Being a consultant for *Liberty Magazine*, she traveled to Japan to attend the surrender of General Yamashita in Baguio; being one of the only two women in attendance. From the surrender, she traveled throughout Japan, one stop being Kyoto, in which she was "the first American woman to enter the city after V-J Day."<sup>196</sup> China was the next stop where she dined with Madame Chiang Kai-shek and conversed on American ways, and then she was off to Rome where she was introduced to the Pope.<sup>197</sup> Jackie concluded her time abroad at the Nuremberg

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<sup>194</sup> "Letter, Jacqueline Cochran to WASPs Regarding Disbandment." NARA—Jacqueline Cochran Papers. [Online version, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/12004149>, National Archives and Records Administration.]

<sup>195</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 216.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid*, 224.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 229.

Trials in November 1945, the war was over and so was her participation in the military, for now at least.

Jackie was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal in 1945 by President Roosevelt. The medal was presented to her at the Pentagon by her trusted friend General Hap Arnold. She would later be named pilot of the decade for years 1940-49 for her war contributions and aviation advancement. With the war finished she returned to breaking as well as setting records, going “higher and faster into the frontiers of aviation than any other woman before her.”<sup>198</sup>

Cochran’s war effort shattered traditional gender roles for women during wartime. Through her creation of the WASP program, women were able to prove their place amongst male pilots in the military.

“These Women’s Air Force Service pilots were going to share that lot with the men. So, their story can’t be one of glamour either. It’s merely the record of a job well done. By comparison with the number of male pilots engaged in the operation, the WASPs were a small group. But by comparison, the job they did equaled the performance of their male partners.”<sup>199</sup>

The success of Cochran’s program was undeniable and allowed for women’s advancements in the military momentarily; Although successful, the military would not resume training women until 1976.<sup>200</sup> Most importantly, Cochran and the

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<sup>198</sup> Korzec, Patricia. “Jacqueline Cochran.” *The Periscope: Women Behaving Badly...For Good*, 2018.

<sup>199</sup> Watson, Elmo. “American Women Pilots Helped Deliver Planes Which Enabled Red Armies to Launch Offensive That May Have Been Turning Point of the War.” *Weekly Call*. December 30, 1944.

<sup>200</sup> “Flying Firsts: The USAF’s First Female Fighter Pilot.” National Air and Space Museum, January 10, 2019. <https://airandspace.si.edu/stories/editorial/first-female-fighter-pilot>.

WASP ladies demonstrated to society that women were efficient and highly capable outside of traditional gender roles. In the coming decades, Cochran would continue to break through the glass ceiling within aviation, breaking countless records and establishing new ones never before reached by any pilot, male or female.



Figure 7. Jackie and General Arnold  
Coachella Valley History Museum  
Coachella Valley Historical Society, Inc.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Records and Accomplishments Post WWII

“Adventure is always right around the corner, and I can turn that corner mighty fast.”<sup>201</sup>

By 1953, Cochran held “all but one of the international closed and straight course air speed records for both men and women.”<sup>202</sup> She would establish forty-nine records in a single flight in 1962, which was the largest number of records ever achieved in a single flight.<sup>203</sup> These achievements were only a glimpse into all that Cochran accomplished in the coming decades. Her name would consistently appear in newspapers all across the country, inspiring women readers with her feats of bravery and tenacity. Through her countless records and accomplishments Cochran would further establish women’s place within aviation, proving that women could fly just as efficiently as a male and in numerous instances do it better. Establishing these records played a vital role in women’s break through into aviation and paved the way for future generations of female pilots, while shattering traditional gender roles and changing societal views of women’s abilities pertaining to aviation.

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<sup>201</sup> Cochran, Jacqueline, and Floyd B. Odum, *The Stars at Noon*, (North Stratford, NH: Ayer Co. Publishers, 2000), 272.

<sup>202</sup> “Jacqueline Cochran Hold All Speed Records but One.” *The Corpus Christi Caller Times*, June 4, 1953.

<sup>203</sup> “Jackie Cochran Over Atlantic: Flight Records Tumble.” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, April 23, 1962.

Through the end of the 1940's and into the 1950's, the aviation world skyrocketed. The "Jet Age" had swiftly arrived and was transforming the idea of speed, taking the industry to new heights.<sup>204</sup> Jackie Cochran was not going to be left behind and intended to stay America's "queen of the air" through achieving feats no woman had yet to do. However, there was one problem, she could not get her hands on a jet within the states due to the militarization of the aircrafts. The solution came through her connections held by her husband Floyd Odlum.

Canadair was a major producer of jets throughout the decade and Floyd decided to buy a commanding share in order to further his wife's aviation exploration. Cochran was then able to become a consultant and advisor to Canadair allowing her to pilot the aircraft with a substantial insurance for both herself and the plane.<sup>205</sup> For several weeks she piloted an F-86 Canadair on a 12-pylon course at Edwards Air Force Base in California. She sought training from her dear friend of several years Major Chuck Yeager, who was the first pilot to fly faster than the speed of sound. To train Jackie, he flew alongside her and radioed instructions.<sup>206</sup> After training, the pair flew side by side on May 18, 1953 faster than the speed of sound. Cochran was timed at 652.337 miles per hour, which not only made her the first woman to fly faster than the speed of sound but also a granted her the new all-time jet record for a 100-kilometer course

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<sup>204</sup> Smith-Daugherty, *Jacqueline Cochran: Biography of a Pioneer Aviator*, 135.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 136.

<sup>206</sup> "Jacqueline Cochran Breaks Sounds Barrier." *The Akron Beacon Journal*, May 19, 1953.

previously set in 1951 by Col. Fred Ascani.<sup>207</sup> Jackie stated that, “passing the sonic barrier with its shock waves and other strange effects was the most exciting and interesting experience in my 21 years of flying, and for good measure I bettered the speed of sound twice in the same day.”<sup>208</sup> Later in 1953, Jackie would be the first woman to receive the gold medal from the Federation Aeronautique Internationale, a governing body in which Jackie would become President of from 1958-1961, the only woman ever to hold that office.

During 1956, Jackie decided to try her hand in politics and ran as a Republican candidate for California’s 29<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, her opponent was Democrat Dalip Saund.

Because of the unique backgrounds of the two leading candidates, the race attracted national attention. “A woman’s ‘smoldering hope’ and the success story of an East Indian immigrant are converging into what is likely to be one of the most colorful Congressional contests of 1956,” reported the *New York Times*. “Seldom if ever has the American melting pot cooked up a spicier election dish than the contest now simmering in California’s 29th Congressional District,” read another article in the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>209</sup>

Despite great effort in her campaign, she lost to Saund in the November election, losing by 3,000 votes which was only a mere 2 percent.<sup>210</sup> Newspapers described the conclusion of the race as a “dramatic, nip, and tuck battle.”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> “Jacqueline Cochran Rips the Sound Barrier; Two World Records.” *The Mercury*. May 19, 1953.

<sup>209</sup> “SAUND, Dalip Singh (Judge).” US House of Representatives: History, Art & Archives. <https://history.house.gov/People/Detail/21228>.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> “Riverside Voters Follow Nation’s Election Trend.” *The San Bernardino County Sun*, November 9, 1956.

Following this loss, Jackie would leave the political arena for good and stick to the world aviation.

In 1957, she received the Air Force Association Award for distinguished civilian service for her leadership of the WASPs during WWII, she was the only woman to have ever been honored by the association. Cochran was also chosen to be the recipient of the General Electric Trophy in 1961, the first civilian pilot (male or female) to receive the trophy. She was selected because of the eight new speed, distance, and altitude records she set in the Northrop T-38 Talan supersonic trainer.<sup>212</sup> One of which being a new F.A.I. record for sustained altitude that was created by the association the year prior, Cochran was the first pilot to hold this new record. At the time of these achievements F.A.I. stated, “Miss Cochran has set 33 international records through the years...making her the top record-holder in the world for both men and women pilots.”<sup>213</sup>

In the following years she would continue to set records, establishing 69 intercity and straight-line distance records in a Jet Star, she would also break two records for a 15-25 kilometer course (one of which being her own) in a Lockheed F-104 traveling at 1,429.297 miles per hour, successfully exceeding Mach 2. “No other woman pilot has ever taken the reins of a single seat F104G, much less put

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<sup>212</sup> “Jacqueline Cochran to Receive General Electric Trophy for Record Flights.” Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum—Jacqueline Cochran Files, Folder Number: CC-344500-02.

<sup>213</sup> “F.A.I. Homologates Cochran’s Sustained Altitude Record, First Pilot to Establish this New International Record.” Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum—Jacqueline Cochran Files, Folder Number: CC-344500-02.

it through its paces in such a demanding exhibition.”<sup>214</sup> Jackie established over 70 aviation records over the course of a decade, and still managed to find time to work on other projects, one of which was a consultant to NASA Space Chief James Webb. She worked with NASA and Dr. Lovelace (a longtime friend) on a program “to test women for astronaut abilities.”<sup>215</sup> Although, she herself would never get the chance to break another record as the first woman in space. In 1971, Jacqueline Cochran was grounded due heart complications that required a pacemaker, her flying days were finished but her legacy would be enduring.



Figure 8. Jackie disembarking from a Jet Star  
Coachella Valley History Museum  
Coachella Valley Historical Society, Inc.

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<sup>214</sup> “Jacqueline Cochran Holds New Women's Flying Speed Record.” *Times Advocate*. May 19, 1964.

<sup>215</sup> Cochran, Brinley, *Jackie Cochran: An Autobiography*, 316.



## Conclusion

The title “greatest of all time” does not do justice to the aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran. From humble beginnings on Sawdust Road, she began work at the age of seven and never stopped. Ultimately, transforming her life from “rags to riches.” Luck undoubtedly played a role in Cochran’s success; however, her fortified determination and will is what granted her the life she built.

Climbing the ladder and breaking through any glass ceiling present, Cochran paved the way for women in aviation. She never viewed her gender as a detriment and instead used her femininity to her advantage. Cochran did not just advance herself but brought fellow female pilots along with her. She helped women establish their place within the military during wartime, she also started the process of involving women into the space program years later.

Upon her death on August 9, 1980 Jackie held over 250 speed, altitude, and distance records. She was the first woman to fly a bomber across the Atlantic, the only woman to become the President of F.A.I., be inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame while still living, awarded the Distinguished Service Medal, the first citizen to be awarded the General Electric Trophy, director of the Women’s Airforce Service Pilots, became a republican candidate for Congress, “receive honorary wings of the French, Chinese, Turkish, Spanish and Royal Thailand Air Forces” alongside countless other feats.<sup>216</sup> She created a successful

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<sup>216</sup> Shapiro, Harvey. “World's Fastest Woman Named to Hall of Fame.” *Dayton Daily News*, November 12, 1971.

cosmetic line from the ground up and helped establish the modern cosmetic industry. Her skill was unparalleled, and thankfully for the world her husband's finances allowed for her to share her talents. Getting her pilots license in three weeks to win a bet, she never stopped her training, she consistently sought to learn everything there was to learn with the ever-advancing field of aviation. "Her career spanned flying history from open cockpit biplanes through sleek jet fighters."<sup>217</sup> Being one of the first women to enter male only races such as the Bendix and not only placing but winning.

The woman was fast, faster than the speed of sound. Although she never received the chance to go into space, her legacy was out of this world. A woman in a class all her own according to Major Yeager. "If speed flying is man's prerogative, then Jackie Cochran is the exception, because she has stood toe to toe with the men and fought it out without fear or favor."<sup>218</sup> Cochran's experiences and accomplishments were a vital factor in women's break through into aviation and paved the way for future generations of female pilots, while shattering traditional gender roles and changing societal views of women's abilities pertaining to aviation. "I will then have the extreme satisfaction that I flew, not only the early planes but their aerodynamic children and grandchildren. And I will be there on the aerial sidelines cheering with my last breath those who

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<sup>217</sup> "Pilot Jacqueline Cochran Dies of Heart Failure." *Santa Cruz Sentinel*. August 10, 1980.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

are carrying on.”<sup>219</sup> The example of a strong, innovative, independent and powerful feminist, ahead of her time and yet very much a part of her time, that Jackie Cochran set is not simply unique, but also remarkable and historically significant and uneclipsed.

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<sup>219</sup> Cochran, Jacqueline, and Floyd B. Odlum, *The Stars at Noon*, (North Stratford, NH: Ayer Co. Publishers, 2000), 272.

APPENDIX A  
TIMELINE

1906 Estimated Birth Year

1906-1915 Lived in Various "Sawmills Towns"

1916 Enter into the beauty industry through shop in Columbus, Georgia

1920 Married Robert H. Cochran

1921 Gave to birth son Robert H. Cochran Jr.

1925 Son passes away

1925 Resides in Bonifay and practicing nursing

1926 Moves to Mobile, Alabama and works at Pearson's Beauty Shop

1927 Divorce granted from Robert H. Cochran

1928 Works at Le Jeanne Beauty Shop in Pensacola, Florida

1928 Attends beauty school in Philadelphia

1929 Moves to New York and works at Antoine Salon

1932 Introduced to Floyd Odlum

1932 Received pilots license from Roosevelt Flying School

1933 Attends Ryan Flying School in San Diego, California

1933 Receives training from Navy pilots

1933 Receives commercial and transport pilots license

1934 Instrumental training with Wesley Smith

1934 First attempt at Bendix; first woman entry

1934 The MacRobertson Race to Australia

1935 Established Jacqueline Cochran Cosmetics

1936 Marries Floyd Odlum in Arizona

1936 Crashed plane prior to her second Bendix Race attempt

1937 Wins 3<sup>rd</sup> place in Bendix

1937 100-kilometer speed record and 1000-kilometer speed record

1937 World's unlimited speed record for women at 301.66 miles per hour

1938 Wins 1<sup>st</sup> place in Bendix and sets a new transcontinental record

1938 Awarded the Clifford B. Harmon Trophy for outstanding achievement

1939 Awarded the Clifford B. Harmon Trophy for outstanding achievement

1939 First blind landing by woman pilot

1939 Women's national altitude record and international speed record

1940 New World speed record for 2000 kilometers

1941 First woman to fly a bomber across the Atlantic.

1941 Elected President of the Ninety-Nines

1942 Director of Women's Flying Training Detachment (WFTD)

1943 Director of Women Pilots (WASP)

1945 Received the U.S. Distinguished Service Medal

1950 Named Pilot of the Decade for 1940-49

1953 First Woman to fly faster than the speed of sound

1958 Elected President of F.A.I.

1961 Awarded General Electric Trophy

1961 NASA consultant

1962 Established 69 intercity and straight-line distance records

1962 First woman to cross the Atlantic in jet airplane

1963 Sold Jacqueline Cochran Cosmetics

1964 First woman to reach Mach 2

1971 Grounded; Enshrined in Aviation Hall of Fame

1980 Passed away due to heart failure

APPENDIX B  
RECORDS, HONORS, AND AWARDS



Jacqueline Cochran held over 250 speed, altitude and distance records. She was awarded countless honorary degrees from universities all over the world, given special recognition by cities such as Los Angeles, and granted decorations from various countries. Below are few of the prominent records and awards for reference.<sup>220</sup>

1) Speed Records:

a) National Aeronautic Association- Certificate of Record

- i) 2,000 km. April 6, 1940 Republic AP-7
- ii) 100 KM April 20, 1940
- iii) 2,000 km. December 10, 1947 p-51
- iv) 3 km Dec. 17, 1947 women's record
- v) 2000km May 22, 1948
- vi) 1,000 km May 24, 1948
- vii) 16 km April 9, 1951
- viii) 500 km Dec. 29, 1949

b) Federation Aeronautique Internationale- Diplome de Record

- i) 100 km May 18, 1953 f-86 Sabre Jet
- ii) 500 km May 23, 1953
- iii) 15 Km June 3, 1953
- iv) Women's Altitude May 24m 1953
- v) 15 km August 24, 1961 Northrop T-38

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<sup>220</sup> Cochran Files, San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives.

- vi) 100 km October 6, 1961
- vii) 500 km Sept. 7, 1961
- viii) 1000 km September 8, 1961
- ix) Distance in closed course September 15, 1961
- x) Distance in straight lines September 18, 1961
- xi) Altitude (absolute) October 12, 1961
- xii) Altitude (sustained) October 12, 1961

1) Awards, Citations, and Honors:

- a) First woman to break the sound barrier
- b) First woman to exceed Mach 2
- c) First woman to fly a bomber across the Atlantic
- d) First woman to fly a jet airplane across the Atlantic
- e) First woman to take off from an aircraft carrier
- f) First woman to make a blind instrument landing
- g) First civilian pilot to receive the General Electric Trophy
- h) Received the Legion of Honor in France
- i) Inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame
- j) The face of an international airmail stamp
- k) Lieutenant Colonel in Air Force Reserves
- l) U.S. Distinguished Service Medal
- m) Inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame
- n) 15 Harmon Trophies

- o) General William E. Mitchell Award
- p) Frank Hawks Memorial Award to Jackie Cochran First Lady to fly through sound barrier, 1953
- q) Aviation award declaring Jackie Cochran's enrollment in National Lafayette Honor list by national sojourners, 1954
- r) Distinguished service award designating Jackie as grand marshal of Palmdale 1964
- s) FAI Diplome de record for 36 FAI course records set April 22, 1962.
- t) Woman of achievement award from American Federation of Soroptimist Club 1956
- u) Zonta National award for achievement in aviation
- v) Spirit of achievement award from women's division Albert Einstein College of medicine of Yeshiva University
- w) Halle Award to JC. Nasa plane dealer, space science fair 1962.
- x) Wooden key to the city of Cleveland, Ohio 1954
- y) Honorary wings of the French, Chinese, Turkish, Spanish and Royal Thailand Air Forces
- z) Republic of France honored Jackie April 13, 1949
- aa) Honorary Doctor of Science Degree from Notre Dame College, New Hampshire
- bb) Jacksonville University Distinguished Service Award 1958
- cc) Honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from Elmira College

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